Sorry I Could Not Travel Both

by Jemsquash

Summary

It's been four years since the Third Shinobi War finally ended and three years since the Kyuubi attack took the life of Konoha's promising Yodaime. The village is down to it's last loyal Sannin, Danzo is putting his fingers in a dozen shadowy plots while the Sandaime focuses on keeping the village running, the great clans are getting restless and the young geniuses of Konoha are being pushed to grow up fast.

The whole situation could really do with a cool headed leader, brimming with talent and ambition.

Not a one-legged Uchiha with a heart full of emotions, a body full of pain and a lack of impulse control. Obito Uchiha is not the Fuuinjutsu user Konoha wants, but she's the one Konoha has to put up with.

(And oh look, someone spilled the beans about the Kyuubi's Jinchuuriki to her. That won't turn out well...)
Notes

If I don’t post it now, it'll sit for another month gathering dust. Hope someone out there still wants this.

Big thanks to YuliaLeafhill who betaed this chapter.

Let me know what you think!
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Brief overview for those starting here or who don't feel like rereading the first 3 parts:

The Uchiha clan have a long tradition of having their girls and woman being male for the duration of their shinobi careers because gender should not be an obstacle to kicking ass and setting things on fire. Obito was one such Uchiha.
In this AU Obito was nabbed by Iwa instead of Madara, put in an illegal POW camp and returned to Konoha a few months after the Kyubi attack, rudely interrupting Kakashi's canon spiral into apathy and suicidal tendencies. She also becomes involved in half a dozen plots and plans for various groups throughout the village including her own clan, who want her married and making Uchiha babies SOON.
After stumbling into becoming Jirayia's apprentice, despite no longer being an active shinobi, and gradually building herself a life and relationship with Kakashi, Obito was horrified the learn of Naruto's existence.

(2 Weeks Before Obito Saw Naruto.)

Obito entered the Hyuuga household and went to Mariko’s rooms without having to talk at all. At this point, everyone was so used to her visits that no one batted an eye at her presence. Hikari at the door even made Obito close and lock the front door behind herself, making Obito feel more welcome here than she was on her own clan lands. It had been less than a week since her dramatic abduction and escape and the air between Obito and her family was still tense.

Mariko, looking as upset and frustrated as Obito felt, looked up from a futon where Neji slept, the corner of her office transformed into a temporary sickroom.

“I thought I had an appointment for today? What happened?” Obito asked softly as Mariko stood up and left her son’s bedside to give Obito a hard, tense hug.

“Are you alright?” they asked together. Then they smiled, small reluctant smiles.

“The same group that kidnapped you, tried to invade the Hyuuga home. They didn’t get anywhere close enough to take anyone, but all our children have been sealed.” Mariko gave Obito another hug, this one warmer. “I was so scared when I heard you were taken. They say ANBU rescued you?”

Obito snorted. “I was on my way back to Konoha when they found me, they barely did anything.”

Mariko pulled away to look her over and raised an eyebrow at where Obito’s freshly healed wound was hidden under her shirt. “Okay, I’m glad I didn’t have to walk back on my own- but I killed most of them.”

“Well, we were very happy to hear you were safe, and that everyone involved is dead.”

Obito tilted her head in confusion. What about the sole survivor she had kept Kakashi from killing? Probably classified. “Yeah, glad it’s over too. My family lost lives fighting them.”
“Really?” Mariko moved away, back to Neji’s side. “I hadn’t heard that, but I’ve been preoccupied.”

She knelt to feel Neji’s bandaged forehead, re-adjusting a cold cloth.

Obito felt awkward at the uncharacteristically tender way Mariko tended to her child and wondered if she should go. “So, since I’m allowed out unescorted again, I guess we can go back to appointments at the clinic?”

“Not necessary,” Mariko said quietly. “I’m glad of the excuse to work more from home,” she looked up at Obito with worry. “With your attempted kidnapping Hinata’s training is to be increased dramatically. Neji has been given the honour of becoming her sparring partner. I’m uneasy about it.”

She stood and walked to her desk, Obito following her. “Neji will spend more time in the main house home than not. His father can’t be there all the time and I’m afraid.”

Obito frowned. “I’m missing something here, some detail you think I know. But all I know is your family has a way to keep your eyes from being harvested, but my family has to fight off attackers all the time.”

Mariko looked at her and sat down at her desk chair. Slowly she reached up and lifted her thick fringe, revealing a simple seal on her forehead, “They say you’ve been studying Fuuinjutsu. Tell me what you can see.”

Obito came closer, pulling a chair for her to sit on, “The style is very different to the Uzu discipline I focus on. Might be Kumo in origin, though I thought they gave up on Fuuinjutsu an age ago. It’s very simple but heavy handed with thick lines. Can I use my Sharingan?”

Mariko nodded, fingers knotted in her lap. Obito decided to give trust for trust and activated both eyes. Mariko’s white eyes widened at the sight of two Sharingan, but she said nothing.

Obito examined the curse seal closely. “The main part of it is a simple fail-safe, linked to your bloodstream. The seal activates when your blood runs low of oxygen. And breaks down all the blood vessels in and around your eyes? There’s a secondary function in the seal as well, this one with an outside trigger. It looks like it’s set to activate on a hand sign and chakra signal. Is that so you can activate it yourself if your eyes are threatened?”

“No.” Mariko’s mouth was set in a flat unhappily line. “I have no control over it.”

Obito narrowed her eyes, using the microscopic vision of the Sharingan to look even closer at the curse seal’s chakra impressions. “The second part of the seal isn’t set down very neatly or positioned very well. It looks like it would cause extreme pain if activated, then eventually led to death, if used for long enough. That seems pointless as a protective measure.”

“But that is the point,” Mariko said resentfully, pulling away from Obito’s examination and moving her hair back to cover her forehead. “The point is to protect the main house from any who would threaten their grip on power.”

Obito stared at her, eyes returning to their usual black colour. “But- who is the seal set to activate for?”

“For Hiashi and the main family,” Mariko said bitterly, standing up abruptly. “It’s the first jutsu any of them learn, how to cause us pain. They’ll probably have Hinata learning it any day now, probably practising on Neji!”
Obito turned her head back to stare at the still resting boy, lying in a perfectly straight line, unnaturally neat in the depth of sleep. Itachi used to sleep like that, unmoving once he finally relaxed into dreamland. Had he ever slept that peacefully again, once he’d had to wash blood from his hands?

“Why would anyone want to teach a child how to hurt their family?” Obito whispered.

“To keep us under their control. To stay in power. Because they can.” Mariko sneered at a wall.

Obito swallowed. “I’m sorry. But I- the seal is sunk into the veins, there’s no way I can remove it. Sorry.”

Mariko whipped her head back to look at Obito with wide eyes, “Oh. No. That’s not why I showed it to you.” She sighed deeply. “I had to talk to someone about it. Hizashi – it’s his twin brother and his father. I can’t tell him how much I hate them sometimes. And Neji loves Hinata, he thinks is it’s an honour to protect her.” Mariko’s face crumpled. “I don’t know what to do. If I should warn him or wait. Hizashi swears no one will use his seal while he’s so young...”

Obito wordlessly opened her arms. Mariko leaned into them. They stayed in the hug a long time.

“Life,” Obito started to say, choosing her words carefully. “Life is hard. It’s unfair. And complicated. The more I learn, the more I don’t understand. I’m sorry. That’s all I can say. That seal is wrong and unfair, and I’m sorry.”

Mariko laughed bitterly. “You know, my parents could never even bring themselves to say that much to me. Like if they just pretended, it would hurt less.” She pulled back to look Obito in the eye. “I will gut the first one who uses Neji’s seal, damn the consequence.”

“Damn straight.” Obito agreed forcefully. “Those bastards don’t have to suffer to keep their eyes safe.”

Mariko pulled away altogether and straightened out her clothes. “The main house has no seals. Rumour is they can’t use the caged bird seal if they wear one themselves.”

Obito frowned. “Speaking as a recently kidnapped doujutsu user, that is a messed-up set of priorities. I would pick keeping my eyes safe over causing my family pain any day.” she smiled slightly, “But at least now I know now why a Byakugan is worth more than a Sharingan.”

Mariko gave a surprised bark of laughter. “You remember to be an Uchiha at the oddest times.”

* 

“So, you’re going to the War Memorial service with us, right?” Shisui asked from the floor as he swept. Obito was scheduled to have several older family members over, to start teaching them Fuuinjutsu and Obito had left getting ready to the last minute. Fortunately, Shisui was one of those strange people who enjoyed cleaning up anything that wasn’t his own mess.

Obito, going through stacks of scrap paper, nodded. “Of course I’m going.”

“Want me to get you flowers, like last year?”

“No,” Obito set down a pile of paper suitable for rough ink work and started to gather the rejected scraps. “I’m gonna go out before dawn with Granny Inoko and help her gather fresh flowers for the official arrangements. I’ll pick my own flowers straight from the Yamanaka meadows.”
“Does Granny Ranma know you call another clan’s member Granny?” Shisui asked worriedly, getting up with his dust cloth. “And that you’re being allowed onto private Yamanaka land?”

“I’m sure your grandmother will bring it up in a lecture someday,” Obito told him. “Can you get down the ink bowls from the high shelves please?” She dropped the unneeded scrap paper by the fireplace and went in search of paintbrushes.

“So, you’ll meet up with us at the ceremony?” Shisui jumped up and knocked the bowls down, catching them casually with one hand and putting them on the counter.

“I have to stand with the clan for the speeches and stuff. But I’m off afterwards.” Obito found an old painting set from one of her babysitting sessions and added the brushes to the table. If her pupils objected they could start bringing their own writing tools.

“... we were hoping we could all go together, like last year.” Shisui was saying, head half out the door as he threw out dirty rags.

“We?”

“Me and Mai, Inabi, Kofun and Osuma. Sakuya can’t make it and Naomi is gonna stay with her husband-”

“You do know he has a name, right? They’ve been married almost a year and we all still call Daisuke ‘Naomi’s husband’-”

“But,” Shisui talked over Obito, “Kofun wants to bring Chikai and I want to bring Itachi. He is kinda a veteran of the war anyway.”

Obito picked up the bowls he’d bought down for her without comment. Itachi had come over to see her and ask for some of his new shinobi clothing to be made smaller. Obito had wanted to refuse, then had given in and sown every protective seal and ward she could into his little shirts and shorts. She got a lump of pain in her stomach whenever she thought of him, trailing behind his older Genin teammates and brisk Jounin teacher.

“Please can you come with us, it was so much fun last year.” Shisui gave her a pleading look.

“Can’t. Have plans.” Obito had negotiated heavily with Kakashi and he had agreed to two hours socialising before they went back to his place. Obito planned to talk enough for them both of them while he lurked in a corner.

“But” Shisui widened his eyes. “You made it so great last time.”

“That’s because I made you all talk to other people.”

Shisui deepened his pout, “Please?”

“No. Now get lost unless you want to hear family complain about me for an hour.”

“It won’t be that bad.”

“’Gosh Obito, if it’s taken you two years to learn that little, it should take the rest of us a week or so.’” Obito affected one of their Jounin aunt’s voice. “’We’ll be able to show you where you’re messing up very soon.’”

Shisui grimaced and came over to give her a hug. “They’re a pain sometimes, but they mean well.
Try to remember that.”

Obito made a frustrated noise at the back of her throat.

*

Kurenai grabbed Obito at the entrance to the bar and cajoled her to the bathroom.

Apparently, dirt covered hands and cheeks plus a wind mussed hair was not an acceptable look on a night out. Maybe Obito should have kept the Uchiha shirt on after the War Memorial service, instead of throwing it at Mai as she escaped the after-speech lingering.

Washed and made up, while Kurenai tried to tame Obito’s hair into shape, she attempted some subtle probing about Obito’s life. Obito deflected, mostly out of habit. She and Kakashi hadn’t been as discreet as they could have been and Obito was amazed her clan hadn’t caught on yet. Surely one of them listened to the villages gossip mills? What happened to all the police snitches they used to get in?

Obito found Kakashi tucked into a quiet corner, leaning against a wall and reading some book with a bright orange cover. “Well?” She turned to show off the fancy side braid Kurenai had put on the right side of her hair, covering her right ear and a lot of her cheek and chin scars.

“Would be a drawback in a fight.” Kakashi said shortly, returning to his book.

“Glad to see your priorities haven’t shifted.” Obito leaned against the wall next to him and peered up to see what he was reading. “Her breasts heaved like a ship in the waves, her pointed nipples like rocks threatening to wreak him-’” She pulled a face. “Seriously?”

Kakashi put the book to his chest defensively. “I needed something I could fit in my pocket and I didn’t want to risk anything work related.”

“I’m not judging you, I’m judging whomever wrote that book. Who describes breasts like that?”

Kakashi frowned and loosened his grip to page through the book. “It’s not that bad, the set up of scenes is very good. Here,” he stopped near the start. “Read that.”

Obito leaned over and together they read a few pages in companionable silence.

“It’s good,” Obito admitted after a while. “The action scenes are believable. But the descriptions are ridiculous. And when the viewpoint is the handmaiden’s, it’s silly.” Obito pointed to a paragraph. “It could be fixed so easily.” She frowned, then leaned away from Kakashi and over to the table next to them. “Excuse me, do you have a pen? I need to edit a book scene.”

The table was made up of several Chuunin, the one Obito was looking at was a middle-aged woman with ink-stained hands.

“What kind of book scene?” a Chuunin with green symbols on his cheeks asked with a friendly leer.

“One where the female anatomy is all wrong.” Obito tugged the book out of Kakashi’s grip and showed it to the wide eyed Chuunin she had addressed, “What’s with male authors and making women describe their figures repeatedly?”

“I always find it off putting,” The woman agreed, pulling a pen out of her hair bun. “But I forgive them if the men are just as objectified. Authors can’t help it if they’re bad at that sort of thing.”
“Well, this author does get the male mindset very well, so there’s no excuse.” She moved over a bit and Obito took the pen and squeezed in on the bench next to the chuunin, “What’s another word for wet?”

“Mouth or vagina?” A broad shouldered ninja with stunning makeup asked, leaning over from the other side of the table.

“Both,” Obito drew a line through a sentence. “And why does she say ‘no, no, don’t do that’, then enjoy it? She’s a world-weary handmaiden, she should know her own kinks.”

“Here, here.” The green-cheeked Chuunin wagged his eyebrows at Obito. She gave him a blank stare, then returned to writing. A tall kunoichi with short cropped hair picked up the back of his chair and dropped it, with him still on the chair, at another table, then took his place next to Obito.

“I heard you were editing Icha Icha. I came to help with the girl on girl scene.” She said matter-of-factly.

“Good to have the help, but first: what kind of birth control would a handmaiden have?” Obito asked, tapping the pen to her lips.

“Depends which court she belonged to,” An elderly Nara announced, dropping into a space on another bench. “Wind is old fashioned and relays on herbs and after sex preventatives. Fire Country have wide access to rubbers. Water is very interesting; they rely on a monthly cycle based on the moon that dictate when it’s safe to-” The women around him stopped their talking to look at him strangely. He assumed a defensive look. “What? Protecting bloodlines is everyone’s responsibility!”

Asuma entered the Ivy Wheel in a rush. “Sorry I’m late, the Budget Councillor had thirds of everything, dinner dragged on.” He came up to the front of the room, where many shinobi active and retired crowded around the serving bar. Kakashi had a seat in direct view of the wall clock, which he was staring at, untouched free drink by his tapping hand. “What happened?” Asuma asked, noticing the bemused faces.

“Obito happened.” Kakashi said calmly, pointing behind him, eyes not leaving the clock face.

Asuma turned back to see several tables had been pushed together in one corner of the room, and were full of talking and arguing shinobi, several of them scribing madly on what looked like pages of a ripped-up book and napkins. The crowd was mostly women, though there were a few men among them, one ranting loudly about acceptable types of lube and prep times.

In the centre of the sprawl, sat Obito on a table holding court; glass of beer in one hand, a pen tucked behind one ear and holding about four different conversations at once.

Orochimaru’s sole surviving student was next to her knees, gently playing with Obito’s laced skirt hem. Kurenai was arguing with two middle aged Genin, making obscene hand gestures at them while they nodded seriously.

Asuma looked back at the bar line of quiet drinkers. “No seriously, what’s happened?”

Kakashi ignored him, gave his drink a final suspicious sniff and stood up as the clock hit the hour. “Two hours of socialising.”

“You just stared at the clock for the last half hour.” objected Hayate, “You took part in about twenty minutes of conversation this whole evening, if that.”
“Yes. And?” Kakashi looked at him curiously. Asuma really missed the headband over Kakashi’s eye. With only a sliver of his facing showing, it had been harder for people to pick up when Kakashi was being rude on purpose. Now with his mismatched eyes on display his lack of concern for social niceties was blatantly obvious.

Kakashi nodded at the room in general, waved a lazy hand at Asuma and left the bar.

About fifteen minutes later, Obito looked up from her conversations, saw the clock and got up to leave, still talking, “Well yes, I understand the enjoyment of a good dominance sex scene, but I think consent is an important issue that is often overlooked in books and reality.” she gathered her coat, Uchiha symbol on either shoulder, smiled and waved at everyone with both hands. “I’m late, gotta go!”

The room seemed to fall quieter, and became less bright and warm in Obito’s absence.

“Why was she wearing an Uchiha coat?”

“I think- she might have been an Uchiha?”

“Seriously?”

“What are we gonna do with all this writing?”

“Fuck it.” announced the first Chuunin Obito had addressed at the start of the madness, ink stains now all over her shirt as well as her hands. “I’m gonna finish it!”

*

Obito found Kakashi leaning against a wall, a street over from the bar. “Sorry about that, I kinda abandoned you to destroy your book.”

“I have another copy at home. It’s signed by the author so no editing that one.”

“Cool. You’ve met the author?”

Kakashi smiled. “A few times. I’ll introduce you some day.”

They walked in silence to a late opened stall and got something greasy to eat. Obito picked at her food for a while then spoke hesitantly, “What do you want for your birthday?”

Kakashi, food almost finished without his face being revealed shrugged. “If I’m not on an away mission? We could go out for dinner, somewhere nice.”

“What’s wrong with where we eat now?” Obito gestured around the tiny bench they sat at and ignored the bug that scuttled under her. “Ignore that, it could be an Aburame insect, off duty and looking for company.”

Kakashi nudged his shoulder to hers. “There’s a place in the south quarter, a rooftop restaurant. You like heights.”

“It’s your birthday, what do you want to do?”

“I want to spend it with you.” Kakashi said simply, then he took on a conflicted look, “And tell Gai we’re dating, before he starts flirting with you for me.”

Obito looked down. Sakuya still wasn’t speaking to her and the unspoken threats between them of
their unsuitable partners weighed heavy on Obito’s heart. But for Kakashi to ask at all meant he cared a great deal.

“Gai’s a good friend. Isn’t he?”

“One of the best.” Kakashi said simply.

“Alright. Just please keep him from announcing it to the world. All that’s keeping us safe is that all members of my clan think that I hate you.”

“Alright.”

Obito finished off her food and waited for Kakashi to finish his last couple of stealth mouthfuls, revealing his face to no one. She took in his off-duty outfit, made up of ninja gear he didn’t use as ANBU. She had never seen him in clothes that weren’t work related. Even his sleeping clothes had weapons hidden in them.

“What’s your clan symbol again. And your clan colours?” she asked, an idea forming in her mind.

“Why?”

“I thought maybe I’d make formal robes for your birthday. You’ll be a year away from eighteen, you’ll have to start attending formal meetings and events soon.”

“ANBU don’t attend council meetings unless on guard duty and I won’t be invited to any social gatherings. The Hatake Clan doesn’t have clan colours.”

“But- your four years of service will be up in two months, you’ll be out of ANBU soon.”

Kakashi frowned. “I’m re-enlisting.”

“Why?”

“Badger recommended me for a captain of my own squad. We’re still low on numbers after the attack. It’s my responsibility to do all I can for the village.”

Obito blinked back sudden tears. “Haven’t you done enough?” she asked softly.

Kakashi frowned, and put a hand to her arm awkwardly. “It’s not all bad. ANBU is- I’m comfortable there. I know my place and my duties. I owe them.”

Obito swallowed. “I suppose I understand that.”

There were silent for a while, both looking down at the counter. Kakashi finished his food and when Obito still didn’t talk, started breaking the meal skewers in half. Obito watched as he placed them down carefully, four equally sized sticks one way, then four lines crossed over them, forming nine diamonds. “That’s the Hatake symbol.” Kakashi said.

Obito blinked, she had never seen it before. “It looks like a game board.”

“It’s a farrow field. We were famers once. Hatake. Get it?”

“Field, farmer. So green and browns would work for a formal robe?” Obito asked hesitantly.

“Whatever you want, Obito.” Kakashi brushed over the sticks, messing up the symbol. “I really don’t care about things like that.”
Obito stretched back in the bed as much as her shoulders allowed and let out a contented sigh. She had dozed after her shower and only opened her eyes when Kakashi returned towelling off his hair. She reluctantly sat up and lazily performed a birth control jutsu on her abdomen, burning away any foreign body fluids lingering in or on her. Kakashi looked up at her through the towel. “I thought using rubbers means you don’t have to use that jutsu as well?”

“It’s not a hundred percent certainty,” Obito waved to her scarless abdomen under her newly healed stomach wound, the only part of her left side that was unblemished, thanks to repeated healings. “Iwa did a lot to my organs down there, really went all out to make me fertile. I don’t want to take any chances.”

She got her clothes on quickly, feeling vulnerable just mentioning her time as a prisoner of war. Most of her hang-ups about medics had faded with constant encounters with Mariko and other trustworthy medical professionals. But speaking of her forced procedures still brought old fears to her mind.

Kakashi didn’t say anything, just finished drying his hair and came over to her, using the towel on her head to properly dry Obito’s hair as she reattached her prosthetic. “You need to use my soap on your hair too, if you really want to hide my scent from your family.”

Obito sniffed a limp black curl curiously. “Should be okay, no one in my family has a heightened sense of smell. Not even most of the summons.”

“Alright,” Kakashi carried on squeezing out the water in her hair. Once she was dry and her leg on properly he spoke up carefully. “You could, go see someone about being… sorted out again.”

“What?” Obito didn’t look up from sorting through her pockets, checking she had everything she’d set out with that morning before dawn.

“I mean-” Kakashi paused long enough that Obito looked up at him. “You could get your tubes tied, since you don’t want children.”

Obito looked lost for a moment.

“Or not.” Kakashi said hurriedly, “You don’t have to, completely your decision. Not really my business at all.”

“It’s not that I don’t want children,” Obito said slowly. “Just, if I do have them, I want to have them when I want to have them, not because of anything else. I don’t want to have a kid that’ll end up passed around the clan as a foster, or one that’s messed up because I wasn’t a good enough mother.” She bit her lip. “I’m definitely not ready for kids now, and I won’t be for years.” She nodded solidly, decision reached and conversation over. “You still have that long mission to Paddy-fields Country tomorrow? Did I waterproof all your gear already?”

Kakashi looked at her carefully, trying to read any lingering doubt in her voice and scent. “My gear’s all done, but could you add seals to my books?”

“Sure, I can add a Glow-Worm seal too, for reading in the dark.”

“Maybe not for a covert mission.”

*
“He’s ready to see you now,” the plain masked ANBU finally announced, an eternity later. The cell Obito was in had nothing but a bare chair, sink and pisspot. The worse of Uchiha prison cells were better than this dank stone holding. Even her old cell back in Iwa had been bigger and better smelling.

But none of that had really phased her. Obito was still riding high on her rage and walked out of the cell without comment after another smaller ANBU operative. Head back, back straight, straight arms, as the elders always told her. Your bloodline goes back seventy-nine generations, each one a killer, walk like you have nothing to fear.

Obito stalked through the narrow corridor, focused on the shinobi leading her. When he tried the old trick of speeding up to harry her, Obito continued walking at the same pace, forcing him to slow and match her speed.

When she finally got to face the Hokage, after weeks of being given the runaround or blatant lies from everyone, she was going to let him have it, Obito vowed. She was going to get some answers, demand to know whose sick idea it was for sensei’s son to grow up as a village pariah.

The corridor ahead of them opened into a huge deep hall, leaving them with only a suspended walkway of wood to walk on. Obito took a deep breath and gathered her thoughts. She was ready to face down the leader of her village. She had faced down demon hosts, war, death and liars. She could handle an old man.

But she was unprepared for the sight of a different old man waiting for her in the centre of several walkways, dark empty space all around him.

The ANBU bowed to the bandaged man. “Lord Danzo,” they said and flickered away at a wave of his single hand.

Obito tilted her head in confusion. “You’re not the Hokage,” she said deflating her posture.

She got a dirty look in response. “I see rumours of your slowness have not been exaggerated.”

“Hey!” Obito glared back, “If I wanted to be insulted by the elderly, I’d have stayed home. The Hokage finally responded to my demands and I expect to see him!”

Danzo brought down his cane with a loud thud. “You have been summoned to face charges for your insubordination. The Hokage has no time for traitors like you.”

Obito took a step forward, enraged. “I am no traitor! How dare you accuse me of such a thing!”

“I have eyewitness accounts of you attacking a Jounin of Konoha! You drew the blood of out the village’s finest, making it impossible for him to fulfil his duties.”

“You exaggerate! I barely did anything to Kakashi!”

“Really?” Danzo pulled out a file and flung it at her. She caught it and looked at the cover. Medical file of Kakashi Hatake. She scoffed.

“Worst I did was break his nose,” Obito muttered opening the file reluctantly. He had totally deserved that first sudden punch, she maintained. The other strikes at him might have been too much, but Kakashi hadn’t bothered to defend himself so how bad could it have been.
Her face went numb when she saw the list of injuries. Broken ribs, bruised lungs, multiple bruises all over his stomach. She paged over frantically, to see the attached pictures, and swallowed back bile as the pictures matched the descriptions. Worse, she instantly recognised the body in the pictures as Kakashi’s. The stomach and chest, both bruised purple and green, were the same ones she had gently stroked a month ago.

Another swallow to hold back vomit and Obito forced herself to look up at Danzo’s judging face. “I- I didn’t mean to,” she said in a small voice.

“Your family is police. How many times do you suppose they’ve heard that from abusive partners?”

“NO!” Obito dropped the file and looked at him desperately. “I didn’t hit him that hard! I know I didn’t. I- he-” She couldn’t control her breath. Her hands were shaking. She tasted vomit in her mouth. “HE DIDN’T FIGHT BACK!” She grasped at reasons not go insane. “Kakashi could have stopped me easily, I couldn’t have hurt him like this!”

Danzo raised an eyebrow. “There are strict laws against shinobi partners hurting their civilian partners. Especially disabled ones. I suppose he knew if he raised a hand, and accidentally hurt you in return, he would have been stripped of his new rank.”

“No.” Obito turned and clutched the side of the walkway, staring down at the darkness below. “I wouldn’t have let that happen,” she whispered. “It was my fault. All my fault.”

“Of course, you have no rank to be stripped of.” Danzo said carelessly, clicking his fingers. A different ANBU reappeared and picked up the fallen medical report, put it into Danzo’s waiting hand and flickered back into the dark. “But injuring an ANBU operative so badly that he is hospital bound for weeks, that can’t go unnoticed. Even for a damaged veteran, such things must be punished.”

“Yes. Of course,” Obito sank down to her knees and bowed. “I will take any punishment you see fit. Is he… is Kakashi going to be alright?”

“Only time will tell. The real tragedy is his squad, sent out to complete a mission without him.”

“But- but surely there are reserve members or another team to replace them?” Obito asked, still sick with guilt. Kakashi didn’t speak of his work much but he would have picked out the members of his new team personally. If they died because he wasn’t there, because Obito had put him in the hospital-

Obito couldn’t bear thinking of it. “Why send them out if they can’t complete the mission?”

“In a misplaced sense of loyalty, Hatake downplayed his injuries, sending his team out ahead of him. By the time the medics realised he was unfit for duty, they were beyond recalling.” Danzo shook his head and paced. Obito still on her knees watched him warily. She had endangered a whole ANBU team, possibly Konoha’s reputation if they failed their mission. All because she couldn’t control her stupid temper. “Such action will cost him his rank as squad captain. And for missing such a simple mission, one he was assigned only because of his Sharingan.” Danzo sighed deeply. “Perhaps I was wrong in dismissing Shisui Uchiha’s application to ANBU. I felt him too young to join, but if Hatake is unable to continue his service-”

“I can do it!” Obito grabbed Danzo’s cane as it tapped past her and clutched it with both hands. “I gave Kakashi his Sharingan, I trained him in its uses. I can go in his place.” She couldn’t breathe. Kakashi, Shisui, the ANBU team. She couldn’t be responsible for their downfalls. “Please. I know I can do this.”
Danzo tugged his cane away roughly, almost knocking Obito’s head. She kept her grip. “You are a retired, crippled, wartime Chuunin. You would be useless on an ANBU mission to Suna.”

“Suna!” Obito pulled the cane closer. “Sir, my cellmate for fourteen months was from Suna. I know Suna customs, their dialect, and their code ciphers! I can fight any Chuunin in my clan barehanded, and my prosthetic is built for shinobi work.” She let go of Danzo’s cane to grab at his coat sleeve. He raised a hand to strike her and she let go to grovel at his feet. “My Sharingan is perfect in every way, with no flaws to it. Please. Lord Danzo.” she begged. “Let me do this mission. For Konoha.”

Danzo stood still and silent above her. Obito tried to contain her shaking. If she went, completed the mission, then everything would be fine again. Kakashi’s team would be safe, Konoha’s reputation secure, and Kakashi wouldn’t have a black mark when his captaincy was reviewed. It was a start to fixing everything. Oh Gods, she had hurt him. She had hurt him so badly.

“My Lord. Please.” she said one final time.

Danzo sighed a deep exasperated sigh and stepped away, her face still flat against the walkway floorboards. “I suppose you can do no more harm than you have already, if you were to join Team 5.” He knocked his cane against the floor, barely missing her fingers. The feet of another shinobi appeared in her eye line. “Rise Uchiha, you have much to make up for.”

* 

Obito signed her blood onto a short-term summoning scroll, the loose formed symbols making her wince. The seal writer must have been made in a hurry to write so untidily. But it would do the job of summoning her to Suna, once the scroll reached the ANBU team via bird delivery.

That scroll was replaced by an official mission scroll, compete with the Hokage’s wax seal and black ribbon signalling it’s ranking. “You have four hours to ready yourself, Uchiha. Complete this mission satisfactorily and I will intercede on Hatake’s behalf and attempt to save his captaincy. Perform well, and I may spare you punishment for your crimes too.”

“I don’t care about myself,” Obito said quietly, taking the scroll. “Just make sure Kakashi doesn’t suffer for my actions.”

Danzo snapped his fingers and once more an ANBU operative emerged this one holding a bag. “The best armour we can offer at such short warning.”

Obito took the bag and bowed. “I won’t fail my village.” No matter what was going on with Minato’s son. She was still loyal to her home.

* 

Obito entered the compound normally and returned home to find Kamo asleep in his armchair. Obito found a brought over stew and prepared it for dinner, tidying the house as she went. What non-perishable food and gear she could use on a mission was quietly added to the bag. Though neither Kamo nor Obito had been on active duty in years, the house was still littered with shinobi tools. Kunai in cutlery drawers, ration bars at the back of cupboards. Clothing Obito had been given to mend and pass on to those that needed them. She could do this mission, if she planned it right.

Finally, guilt gnawing at her stomach, she got out nail cutters and approached her sleeping grandfather, gently waking him up with an offered cup of tea.

“You tidied.” Kamo said accusingly, looking around the neat sitting room. “What did you do?”
“I’m feeling a bit guilty over how I’ve acted these past weeks.” Obito admitted, taking his hand in hers.

“Show me a shinobi without guilt and I’ll show you a psychopath,” Kamo said kindly, as Obito started to cut his nails.

“What’s a psychopath?”

“It’s what we used to call those who killed without remorse or hesitation for little to no reason.” Kamo told her, taking up his tea with his free hand. “My brother Yari was one. Killed summon animals just because he could. Tessai said he died in the landslide, but we all knew she pushed him in. He let her triplet Kita die of poisoning because their Sharingan activated while Yari could never manage it. You have to love something to fear losing it…” Kamo put down his cup curiously.

“Tessai, why are you cutting my nails, I want Mother to do it.”

Obito swallowed. “I am Obito, Grandfather. Rai’s daughter.” she said neutrally as she took his other hand.

“No, our Obito died at the end of the third war, that farmer’s upstart came back with her eye. Fugaku wouldn’t let me blind him.”

“I gave my eye to Kakashi, I’m glad you didn’t hurt him.”

“Yes, that sounds like something Obito would do. But I’m still very angry. That civilian born teacher of hers should have protected them better.”

Obito breathed through her nose as she finished his thumbnail, trying to remain calm.

“Poor little Obito. Maybe I should have taken her out of the academy when she struggled, but she was so happy, even when she was failing. She tried so hard…” Kamo blinked and his eyes cleared.

“Obito? I thought you were still angry with everyone.”

“I can never be mad at you,” she told him softly, blinking back tears. “Let’s eat together.”

*  

After the meal, Kamo easily accepted Obito’s gentle urging to go to bed early. He also accepted Obito’s lie that she would be away a few days, helping Izumi’s mother finally sort through her dead husband’s old things. Obito took a shower, giving Kamo time to settle down with a book. After a thorough scrub and application of long term sun cream everywhere, Obito panicked briefly over underwear. Proper shinobi did not venture out to A-class missions without excellent supporting bras and panties you could wear comfortably for days if necessary. With much shame, she pinched a new black set of Kaoru’s underwear, that Obito had promised to pad and adjust for her. Obito would have to make it up to her later.

Then Obito over-oiled her prosthetic leg, wrapping what parts of it she could in thick bandages. Sand was going to be a bitch on the joints.

Once Kamo was silent in his room, Obito went to his study and, forcing herself to go slowly and quietly, pulled out the big crate Kamo kept packed away, filled with mementos from his siblings and their families.

Obito really must have resembled her great-aunt Tessai, her bodysuit fit better than the lent ANBU body plates, though Obito had to use her father’s old work gloves and a great-uncle’s desert shoes. Great-uncle had brought home a Suna leather worker for a wife, and she had crafted the boots
especially for dealing with the terrain of her former village. She even found a hair net and pin she was sure was her mother’s, to pin her hair into a tight bun.

Great-Aunt Tessai’s bodysuit was in good condition, if very old fashioned, handmade before Konoha’s foundation. It’s tight, thick black weaving was an old technique said to withstand blades and wire, even before it had been treated with toughing waxes and made fire resistant. There were tiny frog fastenings instead of buttons or zippers at the sleeves, leg-ends and all the way down the front. Obito would have thought she had it on backwards but the lamellar body plates fitted her chest and hips tightly and even gave Obito’s shoulder some support, propping up her spine and lower back. Obito felt both naked and extremely protected, her prosthetic leg hidden well once she had finally worked it through the leg sleeve.

With the crate put back she packed pouches in her room; taking food, water, a surprisingly high number of weapons from around her room and her travel sew kit, seal notebook included within it. Over the armour Obito put on a living aunt’s newly mended brown tunic (clan symbol quickly removed), a Genin second cousin’s pouch covered belt and a shawl of her own making, that had been going to be a gift for Naomi’s wedding anniversary.

Obito only started having second thoughts when she started trying to put together a medic kit. Rin had always lost her temper when Team 7 went on desert terrain, Kakashi invariably getting sunburnt no matter what Rin did and Obito forgetting how dangerous fire jutsu became in such a dry climate. Even Minato-sensei drew her ire, getting caught up on wind jutsu study and forgetting to drink enough water.

Rin would not be happy with Obito, she acknowledged as she added burn cream and bandages to her pouches. Rin would have been angry about Naruto too, but she wouldn’t have gone around like a drunk Akimichi, upsetting everyone and having no real progress. And Rin wouldn’t have lost her temper so badly with Kakashi, when he was the only one to tell her the truth. Rin would not approve of Obito running off to Suna without telling anyone, either. But Rin was gone and Obito had to fix things on her own.

She activated the seals to keep her room locked up and packed away the last of her equipment, including the gear she had been given.

Belatedly Obito took out the mask she had been given and looked to see what it was. It was a Toad. A shudder of unease when down her spine. A Toad mask for Jiraiya’s apprentice, what were the chances of that being a happy coincidence? Maybe this whole mission was a set up?

Obito closed her eyes and replayed the scene with Danzo, her Sharingan granting her a perfect memory of the events. The medical charts and photos had been real. Obito had grown up seeing coroner reports and medic textbooks, and she knew how to tell when reports had been changed. And she had offered to go on the mission, she had begged. There was no way Danzo had known she would offer to go. He had nothing to gain with her on the mission instead of Kakashi.

Obito swallowed her unease along with a double dose of her pain medication. She had to do this. She settled down with her shawl, forcing her jittery hands to sew intricate seals into its corners.

When she felt the tug of her chakra, being summoned via the scroll she had signed, Obito had the last-minute urge to resist it. Such summons were easy enough to fight off and if she didn’t go, who would blame her? She was a crippled retired Chuunin, she had no right to go on ANBU missions.

“You had no right to keep this from me!”

Obito flinched at the memory of her own words. She had to go. She needed to fix this. She relaxed
her chakra and let herself be summoned away.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Sarutobi’s glare deepened as he interrupted. “You crashed a puppet and blew it up?”
“I panicked!”
“Then threw yourself off a bat after setting it on fire?”
“Again, panicking.”

It’s normal for Obito to not to understand what's going on. But she’s getting the feeling a lot of people in Konoha are also missing a few details. So why is she the one in trouble?

Chapter Notes

(light Turkish influences added to Suna because I never pass a chance to worldbuild. The scroll summons used to get Obito from Konoha to Suna is the same one used to summon Chuunin in the Forest of Death part of the Chuunin Exam arc. Yay for not making up yet another sealing technique!)

betaed by the wonderful Yulia leafhill.

And this is where the story really starts! My tumblr is https://jemsquash.tumblr.com/, feel free to contact me there or leave a comment here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The ANBU team that Obito found herself with was quiet. Professional. Just the type of people Kakashi would choose to have as teammates, Obito told herself as Lynx explained their mission in a monotone. She was just projecting her own uneasy emotions onto them, unable to shake the feeling that accepting this mission had been a bad idea. The three white masked shinobi hadn’t acted surprised when Obito appeared out of the scroll summons into their bunker, but they were ANBU. Nothing surprised them, even when instead of summoning their illustrious team captain, they got an unfamiliar rookie still working out how to keep their toad mask in place.

The lieutenant in the lynx mask, took to his new role as leader well, reading the scroll Obito had brought twice before beginning the mission brief. The underground bunker they were in was a leftover hideout from wars past, serviceable but grim. Their goal was to intercept communications between the Kazekage and the Puppet Corps, making sure Suna was internally stable and still abiding to their side of the treaty with Konoha. There was a newish map on the cement wall, showing the layout of Suna.

Lynx gestured to it as he spoke. “Once we leave the aqueducts, we assemble in the grain storehouse and wait for the break in the guards’ shifts. Then we break into the Playhouse’s back offices and - ”

“Hang on,” Obito interrupted. “We’re going in Suna’s water supply? Isn’t that against our treaty with them?”
There was silence as the three dark-haired ANBU stared at her blankly. Or it could have just been the masks. The toad one Obito wore was uncomfortable, limiting her expressions and making her slur her words due to the press of the cold porcelain against her lips.

“Okay, I know that sneak in and read private missives from the Kazekage is kinda against the treaty, but their water supply is like our hospital, it’s an act of war to harm it!”

“Only if we’re caught.” Said Lynx slowly, as if speaking to a civilian child.

“Still,” Obito insisted. “What if we accidentally poison the wells or disturb the water distributions? Water is a serious matter in Suna. Water feuds can last three generations! The Kazekage isn’t allowed to interfere in them.” Obito tried to pull a serious face, but the toad mask prevented it. “Also, how are we going to blend in while dripping water? No one properly baths in these months unless they’re ill or for ceremonial reasons. No amount of jutsu will let us blend in.”

“We use jutsu to pull the water off us,” snapped Turtle.

“No,” Obito shook her head slowly. “That won’t dry us completely and we’ll lack the dust on our clothing everyone else will have. Also,” she pointed to the map of Suna pinned to the wall of their bunker. “That’s the Winter Playhouse. The Summer Playhouse is always in the Souk district, to draw bigger crowds. The Winter sessions are more for the rich and noble, so it’s smaller and grander. We could probably just wander into the Summer Playhouse as paying audience.”

“We don’t have any Suna coins,” Turtle told her, “Even if the information you have is correct.”

Goat made a set of handtalk signs and Lynx translated, “And how would you get into the back offices, if you go in as an audience member?”

Obito patted the belt pouch holding her sewing kit and tried to smile. Stupid mask. “No one said I had to stay an audience member.”

*

Obito managed to convince the squad into letting her go ahead of them and try to get into Suna her own way. Even if she didn’t feel bad risking Suna’s water supply her prosthetic wouldn’t allow her to climb or swim well enough to keep up. She would have to go in through the gates.

The official Suna gates were heavily guarded always and all who passed through had to have paperwork. But Aimi had told Obito of one old tradition, one that had technically been made illegal under the Fourth Kazekage’s appointment, but was still carried out by the poorest villagers.

Obito left her ill-fitting toad mask behind in the bunker, but she sealed her belt, her gear and weapons into the sewn seals of her shawl, then rolled her body suit’s sleeves up to hide under her plain tunic. Obito nonchalantly joined the stream of women heading for the well outside of Suna, rolling an empty water barrel scavenged from the Konoha bunker. Her tunic with its and hems undone passed as a ragged dress, with her shawl tied just as Aimi had taught her, only her eyes and top of her hair showing. By the time Obito reached the well she was deep in conversation with a group of old women over the price of silks that time of year. On the way back to the Šuna walls she was carrying an expectant mother’s water gourd for her, letting Wera push the rolling barrel instead. The wall guards didn’t even interrupt Wera’s rant about her swollen feet as they passed through small floodgate into Suna.

Obito followed Wera back to her mother’s home and helped stow away the water before strolling
away munching on offered dates. She sold the water from her tank easily enough, until a local gang drove her out of their territory, taking the tank for themselves.

By that time Obito had enough coins for a puppet show and spent the rest of the morning in the Souk, watching dyers turn plain wool into bright spools of colour and form multi-coloured glass with their bare hands. She ached to copy their fire jutsu but kept her eyes black. She was on a mission.

The matinee at the Summer Playhouse was the tale of the Seven Sisters, though in this interpretation they turned into mountains, not stars like the Konoha version. Obito took a seat on the dirt floor right by the stage and sewed up a rip in her tunic without looking away from the puppeteers.

“You’re very good with a needle.” One of the play workers gathering everyone’s coins said to her as he passed by her. “Any good at button holes?”

Once left alone in the cast wardrobe with a basket of mending, it was disgustingly easy to get into the Director’s office and break into his desk drawers while the cast and staff were busy with the show. Obito memorised the playhouses performance and touring dates, taking special note of when they performed in the Wind Daimyo’s court. A good find was a formal scroll, gold wax seal of the Kazekage still unbroken.

Obito used the barest hint of chakra with the handsigns for a fireball jutsu, creating just a breath of heat to soften the wax seal enough to open a scroll without breaking it. Obito read over the missives and winced. The Kazekage was not the most diplomatic of leaders, ordering them to provide a tutor for his eldest son. The playhouse took in apprentices, they did not send out teachers. This was a situation that had to be dealt with delicately, the playhouse had the right to refuse the Kazekage, but to do so was politically very unwise. But bowing to his demands could also make them seem too weak.

Making sure to copy the memory of the documents exactly, Obito considered what would be best for Konoha. Suna was their ally, they needed the place stable, not preoccupied in internal disputes. She stared at the Kazekage’s broad penmanship, offensively brisk in tone and style.

Obito had spent months filling out paperwork with Ranma breathing down her neck, she had had to perfect a seal to erase her ink blotches from paper. If she could only trust herself to copy the Kazekage’s writing and make the missive less offensive… Naomi was a champion at this sort of thing, if only she was here instead of useless Obito.

She shook her head. Obito had gotten this far. A lick of spit to a blunt needle, re-wetting the ink on the word she wanted to erase, a tiny Milk-Over-Lace seal, and away the word went, the ink drawing together in a wet blob waiting to be reused. Obito pictured Fugaku, talking to the clan elders. In command of them, but respectful, wary. How would he write this request?

Obito wrote.

* 

The only hitch came during her leaving the playhouse, when some of the gang members that took her water tank recognised her and charged. Obito’s pain meds were wearing off by then and running wasn’t possible. She was torn between attempting a jutsu and risking discovery or just taking the beating they would give her, when someone interrupted.

Thick chakra strings grabbed her attackers and held them in place as a broad-shouldered woman strolled up to Obito. “These vermin giving you trouble?” she gestured to the restrained four.
“Not anymore. Thank you.” Obito pulled herself together and made to walk away. “If you could hold them until I get away.”

“No, we need to take this to their families, it’s unacceptable to attack an unarmed cripple.”

“I just want to go home.” Obito said forcefully. “Please, it’s been a long day.”

“Let’s make a report to the rest of the playhouse staff at least. Get them banned from the souk.” The woman took Obito’s bad arm. “They could get away with worse next time.”

“I’m sorry but I have to get home. My family don’t know I’m out here. They won’t be pleased.” Obito tried to tug free, but her shoulder was aching too much.

Her rescuer frowned. “They the reason you have scars all over your arm? The playhouse can grant you sanctuary you know. We could use a good tailor like you.” She turned back to the building, tugging Obito along.

Obito panicked and tore herself free, shawl falling from her face. Obito’s rescuer just had time to register her scared face, before Obito took off, rewrapping her shawl as she limped away.

*

Obito settled in a quiet corner of the souk, sewing kit hidden and shawl rewrapped to show off the more embroidered part of the fabric, hoping it was enough to change her appearance.

She waited out the rest of the afternoon, until it was time for the evening group of women to leave Suna for the outside wells.

The group was smaller in the evening and the women in it much more nervous and tense. No one spoke to Obito as they exited the Suna walls at a fast walk, staying together in a protective bunch. Obito wanted to ask what was wrong but was hard pressed to keep herself from limping and calling attention to herself in the crowd. She held her tongue and waited for them to reach the well, when she could slip away.

Just as the well came into sight, explosions rang out behind them, from the Suna walls. The woman gasped and screamed as smoke billowed out from the top of the sandstone barricades.

“It’s the demon!” one girl screamed, as her headscarf slipped over her eyes.

“Not enough blood,” an older girl hushed her, yanking a strand of white hair stuck in her glasses’ hinge. The group continued towards the well. Suna may be under attack, but their families still needed water to survive.

Obito pulled her shawl over her eyes, shielding them from the blowing sand and hiding her Sharingan form view. Through thin cotton she could just make out three black clad figures facing off against three Suna- No, it was one Suna-nin and two puppets, one a large lizard with a barbed tail and the other a flying hawk with a hooked beak. Looked like some other village had a mission in Suna, Obito was glad she had completed the mission and gotten out so fast. Now she and the team waiting for her could get out of here.

There was another blast of smoke, one of the white figures fell from the wall, only to catch themselves halfway down. Obito’s Sharingan focused on the fallen shinobi, zooming in on them as they used chakra to run back up the wall. They were dressed in a Mist Shocktroop uniform, complete with a blue inked mask. And yet her sharingan automatically tracked the body language, body proportions, the hair under the mask and undeniably said that that was Goat running back to the
fight. Obito focused on the other two attackers and found them to match Lynx and Turtle in size and body type too.

Obito blinked her eyes off and on again, making sure it wasn’t all just some hallucination. Nope, still Kakashi’s team up there fighting some Sand-nin.

“For the love of everything bright and sharp!” she muttered, digging out her emergency pain pills from the seam of her shawl. “Why can nothing be easy?” She swallowed the pills dry, tucked her shawl more tightly around her face and broke away from the tightly packed group, limping back towards Suna.

“Wait! The demon, he’s on the loose!” a voice screamed behind her as Obito struggled with her bodysuit, trying to get the sleeves back down her arms as she jogged painfully slow, willing the pills to work fast. She had no clue how she was going to get up onto the battlements to do anything, Obito still couldn’t chakra climb with her prosthetic leg. She unsealed a handful of shuriken, stuffing them into pockets, ignoring the cuts they made. If the team was fighting someone of average ability and no one interfered, then they should be fine.

That was when another part of the top of the wall exploded.

“INFILTRATORS!” An angry voice bellowed. “HOW DARE YOU ATTACK ME DURING MY BLOOD PRESSURE EXAM.”

Forcing her neck to bend further back than it had in years Obito made out the figure of the shouting woman. The great Chiyo, peerless puppet and poison master. Because nothing in her life could be easy.

Obito brought her neck down with an audible click. This mission was going to leave her with permanent damage. Mariko was going to kill her, if Obito’s family didn’t get to her first. Maybe if Obito was lucky she’d be executed before anyone in Konoha learned where she was, that she had gone on an ANBU ranked mission without telling anyone.

Kakashi’s team was going to be slaughtered and all Obito could do was watch from the ground. She looked around frantically, trying to see anything that could help her. The brown speck that was Chiyo’s bird puppet took flight, turning in the air like a real hawk. A mad idea occurred to her. It was crazy, but it might work. Or kill them all.

“Hey!” She screamed, pulling off her shawl and waving it around. “I’m down here! Come and get me!”

* 

Five minutes later, on top of the hawk puppet and holding chakra strings Obito cursed continuously as she tried take control of the thing as it was yanked back up to the top of the walls. She should have paid more attention to Deidara’s lessons in clay bird flying, it was difficult to control the wings and tail feathers while waiting for the right time to act.

The hawk finally cleared the wall, and Obito used her chakra strings to rip control from Chiyo and force the hawk to continue flying straight up before letting it fall. Chiyo sent out more of her own chakra strings to retake control. But then Goat was blocking her eyeline, fighting her with two curved knives.

Obito and the puppet plummeted, right towards Chiyo. Goat just had time to dive out of the way as Obito jumped off and the puppet collided hard with Chiyo…
Or it would have, if Chiyo hadn’t brought up her other puppet, which took the collision with the bird puppet with no visible damage.

“HA!” Chiyo gloated, coming out from behind the cover of her puppet. “Nice try youngsters. But using a puppet on the great Chiyo is just stu-” That was when the bird puppet exploded, thanks to Obito’s hastily added paper bombs, Chiyo’s lizard puppet going with it. Chiyo was flung back into a pile of rubble.

Obito slowly got to her feet, aching all over. Only her shawl tied over most of her face spared her from further severe scarring. As it was there were now bleeding marks over her old face scars and her shoulder, and most of her body was done with movement. She looked over to Turtle, the only other one on the roof still standing. “If we take her hostage, we might be able to negotiate our escape.” she said softly.

Turtle looked at her and wordlessly drew a kunai. Her body language told Obito a murder was imminent. “We do not negotiate.” Turtle intoned. “The mission is our only concern.” She turned towards the unmoving Chiyo.

“But I completed the mission! I’ve seen the Kazekage’s missives. Hold on a minute!” Obito yelled as Turtle advanced on the old woman. “There’s no reason to kill her, that’s not our mission. She’s important to Suna. We’re supposed-” Obito cut herself off. Yelling they were allies would only reveal which village they were from. “Why are you doing this?”

“Our mission was always to murder Suna’s best medic-nin.” Lynx told her as he pulled himself to his feet. He was badly injured with a kunai to the chest. “You were just an unexpected addition to the plan. No Turtle,” he said to his teammate, as she was about to slit Chiyo’s throat. “Use one of Toad’s weapons and make it look messy, like an amateur attempt. Quickly now.”

“Fuck you.” Obito responded automatically, more upset that they thought she had never killed someone, than that they were about to frame her. “Stay away from me.” she tried to take a defensive stance, but her legs just couldn’t handle the strain. “And stay away from Chiyo too. This makes no sense. What point is there in murdering her and making it look like it was me. No one profits from this; our village will be blamed for it. This could lead to war.”

“A war we would win.” Turtle grinned easily grabbing both Obito’s hands and forcing them behind her back. “But it’s unlikely our whole village will be blamed if your body is the one found with the murder weapon.” She roughly searched Obito for a weapon.

“No one would ever believe I came here on my own.” Obito sneered and tried to bite at her. This whole situation was ridiculous. A minute ago, she was saving them and now the team was framing her for a secret mission?

“No. They’ll think your family sent you.” Turtle said softly pulling out shuriken from Obito’s shirt sleeve. She grinned viciously and turned, throwing them directly at Chiyo’s unmoving body. Obito screamed.

Chiyo sat up, blood over her face, and smirked manically as she caught all three shuriken with a single thread of chakra. “So good of you to explain before I had to waste time interrogating you!”

Turtle cursed and turned back to Obito, last shuriken held to cut at Obito’s right eye. But another elderly Suna nin dropped his genjutsu to reveal himself and grabbed her wrist easily, knocking Turtle out with a blow to the neck.

“I had it under control Ebizō!” Chiyo objected, getting to her feet.
“Of course you did, Big Sister.” Suna’s second master puppeteer said amiably, grabbing Obito as she tried to hobble away. “That’s why I told the rest of the guards to stay away and let you have your fun.”

Obito looked around. Goat was still lying unmoving on the ground and Lynx was wrapped up in chakra strings. She gulped and looked up at the smirking Ebizō and agitatedly grinning Chiyo. She was confused and betrayed and in so much pain, “So am I still gonna die or what?” she demanded, beyond self-preservation.

Ebizō finished patting her down for weapons, and frowned. “Good question. What do you think Sis?”

Chiyo kicked Goat’s body curiously. “This one is already dead. Suicide pill by the smell of it. And that one’s not long for this world with that wound.” She tilted her head at Lynx’s bleeding chest wound. “Would be a kindness to end him now.”

“No!” Obito yelled involuntary, shocked that Goat was dead. He wasn’t supposed to be here, none of them were. What the hell was going on. She wanted her family. She wanted her team. She wanted Kakashi. He was going to be so sad.

“Girl, you did hear the part about how you were set up take the blame for murdering Chiyo and causing a war?” Ebizō asked in disbelief. “These people are not your friends.”

“I- I know but…” Obito lost the battle with her legs and sank down to the ground. “I don’t know what’s going on exactly. But killing more people isn’t going to provide answers.”

“Bet you they’re from Konoha.” Ebizō said ideally stripping off Obito’s shawl to reveal her face. “This one copied the chakra strings jutsu to use your hawk puppet. Must be an Uchiha.” He examined her bleeding face, blood covering most of her scars. “Though she’s too messed up to tell on sight alone.” He used her shawl to tie her wrists together, but after feeling her false leg left the rest of her untied.

“You can’t copy jutsu as complicated as chakra string and know how to use it right away.” Chiyo said, searching Goat’s body. “It would take weeks to learn how to steer a puppet, even for such a short time. She must be of Suna blood. Ah,” she pulled out Obito’s toad mask from Goat’s back pouch. “There you go, clear attempt to frame Konoha. Like that pansy Sarutobi would really try anything.”

It was at this moment, held captive by Suna’s foremost nins, half her team dead or dying and utterly confused by everything, that Obito’s painkillers finally kicked in. The sudden lack of pain made her lightheaded and willing to try to save herself. She sighed deeply. “I should have known this whole thing was suspicious.” Obito said putting a soft twang into her accent, one she had heard endlessly while a prisoner of war in Iwa.

Chiyo didn’t look up from Lynx’s wounded body but she made an enquiring noise, encouraging Obito to go on.

“They said it was an easy mission, make sure you two were out of the picture politically. I should have known they meant kill you, not make sure you had peacefully retired.” Obito leaned her head down onto the rubble next to her. “I’m so stupid. A stupid idiot. Stupid stupidstupidSTUPID!” Obito didn’t have to fake her emotion as she beat her head against the rubble, bloodying her face even more before Ebizō grabbed a hold of her hair and forced her to stop. “I thought I was helping.” she said softly and burst into messy tears.
“I take it back.” Ebizō muttered as Chiyo came up to them. “No way this kid’s Uchiha. Way too little pride.”

“Who sent you here? Why did they want to frame you?” Chiyo demanded, taking over Ebizo’s grip on her hair bun.

“I- I fell in love. With someone I should have never dared love.” Obito’s tears leaked down her face as she looked up pleadingly. “I wanted to be worthy. I wanted to prove them all wrong.” Her family had always taught her, when you must lie, lie as close to the truth as you can. Convince yourself you’re not lying. And she wasn’t, Obito realised with a jolt. She had wanted to be worthy, prove everyone had been wrong to lie to her. She had fallen in love. She wept harder.

Chiyo shook her. “I didn’t ask for your life story. Just tell me who sent you!”

“The Tsuchikage! He caught me with his son!” Obito sobbed out.

“That Rock Golem? Why the hell would he care who his family fucks?”

Obito sniffed pitifully. “Kyushu’s a priest. To spy on the Earth Temple leadership for his father. He can’t be involved with a crippled halfbreed from Suna. The scandal would ruin him and his father.” She went back to sobbing. “He told me this would fix everything. Prove me worthy.” For once she was grateful it was so easy for her to cry

Chiyo and Ebizō exchanged looks. “That sounds about right.” Ebizō muttered. “I heard Ōnoki’s middle son was a weak-willed monk. That rebellion a few years back really damaged his hold on power. If the priests turned against him-”

“So what? It’s Iwa disguised as Kiri framing Konoha? How does that make any sense?”

“Maybe the Rock Golem finally lost it. But let’s get all of them in the cells and then we interrogate them properly.”

“Wait, weren’t there four-”

Turtle’s spray of water blew both Suna elders away, right over the wall. Obito, being on her knees, was only pushed back into a pile of rubble, not going over the edge as well. A swipe of blood and hand seals resulted in a large bat summon appearing in another burst of wind.

Obito’s right hand contorted in a way only possible after having multiple finger bones crushed in a cave in, allowing her to slip out of her bindings. Even as Obito got her hands free, Turtle grabbed the still unconscious Lynx and snapped his neck without hesitation. She didn’t even glance at the dead Goat’s body. Obito stayed low and crawled to the body, grabbing her discarded toad mask and mission scroll on the way, both now covered in blood. She looked down at Goat’s body helplessly. Then hardened her heart and pulled up his left sleeve. The ANBU tattoo on his arm looked real enough, but it wasn’t raised to the touch, like Kakashi’s was. They weren’t even proper ANBU, let alone Kakashi’s own team.

Fuck. She was a fool. Danzo had played her like a puppet.

Obito considered her situation as she sealed Goat and Lynx’s bodies in an empty storage seal in her shawl. Painkillers granted her movement and strength, but she was still stuck on the walls of Suna, no allies to her name. Chiyo and Ebizō would be back on the wall in seconds. She was stuck.

Turtle mounted her bat summon and finally looked over to Obito. “Well? Get over here so we can go.”
Obito was unable to form a response to that. Turtle had tried to kill her five minutes ago. She had Lynx’s blood on her hands. There was no way Obito was going with Turtle.

“NEVER MIND HELPING US UP! GET THE INTRUDERS!”

Obito was up behind Turtle on the bat before Chiyo had finished yelling. She’d take her chances with one enemy over a whole village.

The bat flapped its wings, launching into the air with unnatural speed. Obito glanced down to see Suna nin swarming over the destroyed wall, Chiyo and Ebizō hanging over the side by chakra strings and yelling at each other. The area they had fought in grew smaller and smaller as the bat flew directly up, into the setting sun. A few weapons were thrown their way, but none made any impact. Obito pulled out her trusty knife and held it ready to stab Turtle if she tried anything.

“If you kill or knock me out Kuro returns to his dimension and you fall to your death.” Turtle said calmly, as the bat started to fly horizontally, hopefully towards Konoha.

“What the fuck was all that? Who are you and what do you want?” Obito demanded, still poised to use the knife on her.

Turtle didn’t turn to look at her. “I am a loyal soldier of Konoha and my only purpose is to keep Konoha strong.”

“By pissing off our allies! And framing me for it!” Obito screamed, rushing air stealing her loudness.

“Suna must remain weak or they will turn on us. Chiyo is a potential threat and you are a weakness to Konoha, drawing bloodline hunters to our walls.”

Obito winched at the accusation, even while still indignant. “There are easier ways to kill me, than sending me on a false mission to Suna. Who do you work for?”

“I work for the good of Konoha.” She said in a fanatic tone.

“Oh for the love of…who sent you?”

“Lord Danzo controls the Roots of Konoha.”

Obito hissed between her teeth. It was Danzo behind all this. He had tricked her into accepting a mission to Suna, expecting her to die and spare Konoha the burden of her tempting Sharingan. Did that mean he had lied about everything? Maybe Kakashi was alright- she squashed that thought and all feelings and revelations attached to it. She could deal with that when she wasn’t sharing a ride with a radical aiming to kill her.

“I’m assuming we’re flying home now. And you’ll tell Danzo you failed your mission.” She said, slowly putting her knife away. She would need both her hands free.

Turtle laughed harshly. “Lord Danzo’s plans are impossible to completely fail. Suna may still have their strongest shinobi, and you remain unframed, but they think Kiri attacked them. And while Suna turns their concerns to Kiri they will have to ask for Konoha’s aid to deal with a village so different to their own.”

“Okay.” Obito didn’t remind her that she had tried to convince Chiyo and Ebizō that Iwa was behind the attack, a village Suna was capable of fighting unaided. “So…why did you save me when you abandoned your teammates.” Killed. Turtle had killed Lynx when she could have saved him and left Obito behind. She didn’t know how to feel about that.
“I did Lynx a kindness, he was unlikely to survive a journey with that injury. Suna would have tortured him and even if he did survive the flight, Lord Danzo—.” Turtle paused, the first signs of humanity in her voice. “The mission always comes first. Your eye is to remain out of enemy hands, until…”

“Until what?” Obito demanded, already running her hands through a set of handseals.

“Until he can take it for himself.” Turtle turned and dodged the fire Obito blew at her, knife out and aiming for Obito’s face.

Obito kept up the stream of fire from her mouth, turning her neck. Turtle twisted out of the way and got a grip on Obito’s shawl. “Hold still! There’s nowhere you can go!”

Obito stopped her breath and looked at Turtle as she came closer, raising a bloody eyebrow. Then she spat out her last mouthful of fire, right into Turtle’s mask eyeholes. As the Root agent screamed Obito rolled away, off the back of the panicking bat.

Obito had time to look up as she fell through the sky and see the bat fail to follow her, preoccupied with its blinded summoner and still burning head fur. She didn’t think they’d be coming after her. She just had enough time to shake her shawl out and grab the edges, praying it would slow her fall.

It didn’t.

*

“Did I know what?” Kakashi was smiling at her under his mask, letting her pull on his shirt hem.

“I- I saw something in the East quarter,” Obito said hesitantly. She had spent a week trying to talk to her family about seeing the child with sensei’s hair and eyes, and everyone had roughly ignored her or yelled at her until she shut up. Even family members she trusted the most had been almost violent with her.

“Obito?” Kakashi looked at her and took her hand gently. “What is it. What did you see?”

Obito swallowed. “I saw a boy, a little boy. He looked a lot like Kushina.”

Kakashi’s grip on her hand tightened a minuscule twitch, almost unnoticed by Obito as she looked into his eyes. “We have a lot of Uzu refugee’s in that quarter. It’s natural you’d see people with her features.”

“This boy didn’t just look like Kushina. He looked like sensei too.” Obito watched closely, but Kakashi’s face gave away nothing. “Did- did they have a kid, before they died?”

Kakashi looked straight at her. “Don’t you think you’d have been told,”

Obito let out a relied breath and put her head to his chest. Thank goodness. It was just her, just stupid Obito making assumptions and pissing everyone off. No big conspiracy, no secret child of sensei.

“If you could be trusted with the information?”

No.

No. No. No.

This wasn’t happening.
Obito stiffened, then pulled herself away from Kakashi, separating them by wide steps. He looked at her with a resigned expression as she tried to talk. “What are you trying to tell me?”

“Nothing. You’re not allowed to know anything.” There was the thinnest hint of emotion in Kakashi’s voice. “Let’s not talk about it anymore.”

“Wait! Wait, what?” Obito was struggling to breath. No, she was just breathing too fast. The clearing around her spun. Or was her Sharingan on again?

Something was burning in her chest. Was it shock or rage? The trees and rocks around her were still again.


“I can’t tell you. It is nothing that concerns you. You don’t need to worry about the boy.” Kakashi’s voice, regretful and urgent.

“The boy? The boy? If that boy is sensei’s son and he’s living in an overcrowded civilian orphanage, then how can you live with yourself doing nothing for him? Do you even care?” Rage was building.

“I am not allowed to-“

“Not allowed to care! You don’t care about anything that’s not part of your shinobi duties? Then what does that make me? A useful source of chakra and Uchiha secrets? A left-over obligation?” Obito spat spittle as she finished her shriek. “Go to hell Hatake!” She turned to leave, incensed with rage, when Kakashi caught her hand.

Obito woke up then face down on the hot ground, sand and dried blood everywhere over her. But she remembered with guilt what had happened after that.

Obito had hit Kakashi in the face before he had time to let go of her hand, a week of denial and anger from her family getting caught up with her feelings of betrayal. No one had told her anything, no one cared. They all seemed to hate poor little Naruto and shut her down when she tried to talk about her teacher.

She hadn’t seen Kakashi as she continued to attack wildly. She had seen Mai telling her to “Drop the fucking subject this minute, Obito.” She had seen Auntie Izanami saying, “Don’t mention that creature in my house Obito’, Ranma saying “Who cares where it came from, as long as it stays far away from us.” Yashiro sneering “Don’t be so naive Obito, there’s no way the boy is shinobi bred.” Mikoto telling her sarcastically to “Ask the Hokage, Obito. Don’t waste more of the clan’s time.” It was all the youngsters insisting, “That boy is trouble. Big trouble. Stay far away from him Auntie.” It was Kamo pretending to be forgetful to escape the questions all together. It was Fugaku outright ordering her never to speak of her teacher or that boy ever again, “Don’t make me make your life more unpleasant than it had to be Obito, do not push me.”

Obito had only noticed the blood on her fists afterwards, after stomping home and curling up in her bed, sobbing her heart out. She spent a week moping about her room and no one came to her, no one asked her what was wrong. She had never been so alone before.

She only left the house when an answer to her query to the Hokage had shown up at her window, asking to meet her in the Hokage Tower lower levels. That had turned out to be from Danzo, telling her she had hurt Kakashi much worse than she could have ever have guessed.
Obito sighed and sat up, shaking sand from her hair. She could fix this. She would get back to Konoha, apologise to Kakashi, speak to the Hokage and somehow fix everything. She had to.

* 

Obito huddled as best she could under her makeshift shelter. Her entire body throbbed in discomfort, pain held at bay by the contents of her medical kit. There was endless sand in every direction she looked and no markers to help her get her bearings. Her only chance was to wait for night and pray the stars were ones she could use to navigate her way home. It belatedly occurred to her that there should have been a summon scroll to return her home after the mission. Why hadn’t she thought of that?

The tracking seal under her arm tingled, as if mocking her. She was too far from home, none would be able to sense her chakra, would be able to track her down. If anyone would truly want to bother, considering how every Sharingan user in Konoha was angry at her right now. She’s rather wonder lost in the desert than know no one cared she was gone.

Then a small figure stumbled into view over a small dune. They were covered in a good quality desert coat, red hair peeking out from under his hood.

“What are you doing out here?” Obito demanded, standing to look behind the boy for more people. “It’s high noon, you shouldn’t be out in the sun!”

The boy frowned at her and slowly walked closer. He was extremely young, more toddler than child with bright green eyes that watched her cautiously.

Obito sighed to herself and sat back down under the cloth shade. Three was too young to worry about him being shinobi, so he must be a lost child from the trading tribes. “Get under here before you burn to a crisp.” She shouted, gesturing to next to her.

After tilting his head and staring at her for a long minute, the boy hesitantly came forward and knelt next to Obito. Her ripped open tunic staked out with wire thread and kunai had just enough room for them both. The cooling seals in it barely kept the hot air at bay with two bodies now generating heat.

“Do you have water?” Obito asked reluctantly. “I have a little but you can have a sip if you need it.”

Wordlessly the boy pulled out an animal skin flask and took a deep sip from it. Obito’s dry throat itched as she watched him swallow, but she needed to ration her water.

The boy looked at her and noticed when her eyes trailed the few drops that spilt as he pulled away from the flask mouth. Slowly he held out the still half full flask, looking concerned.

Obito swallowed and made herself refuse. “No. Thank you. I can’t take your water, it wouldn’t be right.”

The boy’s face turned stricken and he seemed about to cry as he waved the flask at her.

“No, sweetie. Don’t cry. We can’t waste the water. Shhh. Shhhushhh.” Obito cooed at him, pushing away the flask. “If you cry, I’ll cry and that’s such a waste in the desert.”

The boy’s other hand caught hers on the flask, holding it there as he pushed it towards her, turning it as he pushed. Obito couldn’t bear to let the water spill. She leaned forward and caught the bulk of the spilling water in her mouth, forcing the flask upright again. She held the warm water in her mouth and slowly swallowed it in tiny sips.
The flask was put away with the boy smiling, still holding her hand. There was a tang to the water, electrodes and salt the body lost in the desert. She wondered who gave a child such high class supplies but let him wander around the desert unsupervised.

“Thank you. Does anyone know you’re out here?” She asked, when the last bit of water was gone from her mouth.

“Mother.” The boy said simply, in a raspy voice. “Mother knows.”

“-Right.” Obito guessed the boy was from a trading tribe near here, or maybe one of the few shinobi clans that didn’t move to Suna permanently but migrated in the low seasons.

“When the sun goes down a bit, we should go look for her.” Obito said softly. She now had a redhead leaning on her bad arm, making her sore and uncomfortably sticky, but she didn’t have energy to shake him off. “I want to go east. Do you know which way is east? The mountain pass and scrublands?”

With his free hand, the boy picked up a handful of sand and let it trickle through his fingers, watching as a breeze gently blew the sand in one direction. The breeze was so slight Obito hadn’t even felt it.

“West,” the boy said, pointing in the direction the sand fell. “North,” he pointed behind them.

Obito let out a relieved breath. Even if he was wrong, at least now she knew how not to go in circles, but stick to one direction. If she got the kid back to his people safely, they might spare her an animal mount, certainly more water. She could risk selling some of her seals too, if they were still reluctant. Once she was on the border she would give in and use her tracking seal. Even if no one wanted to deal with her, they’d send an escort to get her eye out of reach of Konoha’s enemies…

While Obito plotted, the little boy leaned his head against her shoulder, eyes slowly blinking.

“What’s your name, by the way?”

“Gaara.” The boy said as his eyes slid closed and he slept, the unusual comfort of another person relaxing his guard.

*

It was the sand that warned Obito she was in trouble. Sand was uncomfortable everywhere in her bodysuit, but it was more uncomfortable when it was sucked off you to merge around a sleeping boy and form some crazy sand Tanuki.

The thing had about half a minute to cackle and chase after her, Obito certain that this was finally the day she died, in the middle of nowhere with everyone she had ever loved angry at her. Then she belatedly remembered her Sharingan and caught him in her crimson glare. The Tanuki skidded to a halt and froze at the sight of her red eyes.

“Today is not a good day for me! I am lost, hot, really need to pee and just had sand yanked right out of my bodysuit to form your twisted sand-chakra body. Sit down and shut up while I work out what to do next!” Obito yelled up at it.

The monster crashed down on his stomach in the sand, the poor child dangling unconscious between its large yellow eyes, half covered in sand. Under its poisonous glare, Obito carefully took up her knocked over shelter and tucked the tunic over Gaara’s body, protecting him from the sun.
She sat down in the shade of the monster’s bulk, right next to one of its eyes and tried to plot. She had nothing now, no kid to use as a bargaining point, just some stupid demon. Why did she meet so many possessed humans? What did she do to deserve this? She squashed the guilt she felt as the demon’s face contorted, trying to fight off her commands and speak. The black tomoe of her eyes spun in slow circles, a slow burn of chakra spent to keep the monster controlled. If Obito was anywhere else, with a way to hide or outrun the creature, she would try forcing more chakra into her eyes, forcing the beast back into his host, as she had with Rōshi in the Iwa prison. But this demon was fully formed, his host so young. What if she killed Gaara, or lost control of the demon. In Iwa she had been prepared to die in the attempt to escape. Obito had too much to do now, to risk death.

Sighing Obito addressed the beast. “What? Speak if you must.”

The Tanuki spoke hesitantly, for a house sized demon of chakra and sand. “Aren’t you going to order me to rampage and kill stuff for you?”

Obito looked around at the complete emptiness of the dunes around them. “No.”

“No. Should I?” Obito decided to humour the beast, as she had nothing else to do until the sun started to set.

The monster gave a creepy grin and told her exactly who and what he was.

* Ichibi reminded Obito of the most unrepentant criminals brought into the police station, utterly convinced of their own innocence despite the blood still on their hands.

“So, you were sealed into this kid as a baby and only come out when he’s sleeping.” Obito recapped.

“Deep sleeping. Life’s been dull since he started sticking to short naps.”

“And you have 8 siblings. But you are the oldest and wisest.”

“And the strongest! No matter what Kyuubi says I’m the strongest and best of us 9.”

“The Kyuubi…”

“That stupid loudmouth!”

Obito’s brain, hampered by the heat and stress of her situation, still having to maintain eye contact to keep Ichibi controlled, none the less tried to make her connect several facts.

“Your sibling is Kyuubi… and you are sealed in a human. By use of seals.”

“One seal. One stupid painful unmovable seal. Only stops working when my brat host dies.”

Kushina had had a demon in her too. Obito had seen Mikoto control her on the battlefield, when Kushina’s demonic chakra threatened to overtake her the way Ichibi’s had formed his sand body around his poor host. And Kushina had died when the Kyuubi attacked, but no one mentioned a second demon running about. Unless… Kushina’s demon had been Kyuubi all along. She had had such a huge dangerous demon inside her, not a weak little kitsune or kappa as Obito had always assumed. But if Kushina’s demon had been the Kyuubi, then Kushina must have died before the Kyuubi appeared, maybe right after childbirth.
Obito pushed back the voice in her head freaking out about her teacher’s girlfriend having the fucking Kyuubi in her, the fact that there was one of the great demons leaning over her and that her eyes could control it. No wonder her family was always going on about the sharingan’s greatness, it could control truly powerful demons!

Obito forced herself to speak in a calm tone. “The Kyuubi is dead. Mina- I mean, the Fourth Hokage killed him three year ago.”

Ichibi made a rude noise through his nose, making Gaara’s unconscious body jerk alarmingly. “Humans can’t kill any of us, no matter what they do. That’s why you pitiful humans started sealing us away.”

If Kushina was dead, and Minato-sensei had sealed away the Kyuubi and died... Then where was the new Kyuubi host? Was there a way to spot a jinchuuriki before they used demonic chakra to kill you?

Rōshi, in the Iwa prison had had grotesquely large and hairy knuckles, due to his monkey demon, and Obito had controlled him just as she was now controlling Ichibi... If Suna had Ichibi and Konoha had apparently had Kyuubi, then would it be a stretch for Iwa to have another great demon too?

She spoke hesitantly, “Was one of your brothers in Iwa? He has lava powers and a really scary laugh.”

“My laugh is scary!” Ichibi let out a maniacal cackle that echoed over the sand dunes and made Obito want to pee even more out of fear. She increased the amount of chakra in her eyes, forcing him to stop.

“Yes, yes. Terrifying. But do you? Have a brother over there?”

“Sounds like Yonbi, that smelly monkey brain.” So, if a monkey demon gave their host monkey knuckles-

“Your host has those back marks around his eyes,” Obito gestured to the sleeping child’s eye bags.

“The loathsome mark of one cursed to imprison the powerful me!”

“So if a baby was forced to host the Kyuubi he would have-“

“Silly little whisker marks.” Ichibi said gleefully.

Obito closed her eyes in despair.

Naruto was the Kyuubi host. That was why Izumi called him the bad boy and everyone hated and feared him. Why everyone refused to consider him the son of their beloved martyr Hokage. Probably why the Uchiha wanted to stay far away from him. No one wanted to be accused of controlling him if he tripped in the street or used the demon’s chakra to hurt someone. Jiraiya had deliberately checked to make sure she didn’t know anything about jinchuuriki, he was in on it too.

That was why Kakashi had been ordered to keep her in the dark. He had been telling the truth, had been trying to protect her. Protect Naruto. And she had just turned on him, like a monster.

Obito opened her eyes just in time to stop Ichibi from crushing her with a paw. “STOP.” she screamed. The paw froze above her head and Ichibi whined in disappointment.

“I have to get home.” She said. “I have to be fast, I have so much to do.” She looked up at the giant
sand tanuki. “I have an idea but you won’t like it.” And she really would need to pee first.

*

Some two hours later, Ichibi jumped the last river before the Land of Fire border. Obito uncurled herself from behind Gaara’s limp body, gently resettling him in a comfortable sleeping position. She kissed his sandy cheek and slid down the Ichibi’s face to land on the wet pebbly ground. She looked up at the silent monster, his face contorted with rage.

“Is there any way I can repay you?” She asked half-heartedly.

Two yellow eyes leaned down to almost touch her. “Kill the boy and set me free.” He demanded.

“No.”

“Release me from this genjutsu and let me kill you.” He howled.

“No.”

“Let me kill-“

“NO! No killing. Sorry I can’t free you but no killing!” Obito yelled up at him. She clenched her fists. Some of her family could erase memories and control minds even after losing eye contact with their victims. But Obito had never wanted to learn such things. Even with the demonic creature before her, she didn’t want to violate him more than she had already. “Just, go back the way we came and don’t hurt anyone.” She waved a hand, putting all the chakra she could into her eyes.

“I’ll remember this injustice Uchiha.” Ichibi threatened as he turned and leaped back over the river, heading back into River territory, Wind Country beyond it.

Obito watched until he had disappeared into the distance, then deactivated her eyes with a sigh. The sun, the sand and having to constantly keep eye contact with the demon had been draining.

Then she sank to her knees and drank icy cold water until she felt sick. She was a day’s run from home, which would take her much longer to walk. She had a village elder to accuse, a teammate to beg forgiveness from and a child jinchuuriki to sort out. It didn’t even occur to her to wonder how the demon knew her family name.

*

Her first stroke of luck had been encountering Ichibi, though Obito only admitted that once he was far far away from her.

The second was managing to encounter Daisuke’s parents on a trip back to the Fire Daimyo’s capital with new silks to sell. Obito had bought sewing material from them exclusively after Naomi’s marriage to their son and they trusted her just enough to lend her their least valuable horse. Obito tried not to think about how much sewing she would have to do to pay them back. The nag was slow, but meant Obito could travel through the night on the merchant’s road and left her relatively fresh for the next day. She left it with a farmer when the mare was exhausted, leaving Obito with less than a day’s walk to do.

Her final stroke of luck was coming across a pair of Konoha shinobi practising their sword skills some distance away from the Konoha walls.

At least that was what Obito assumed they had been doing, eyeing the set of swords abandoned by a
tree and listening to the giggling and rustling coming from the long grass.

“Hello?” she called, “Anyone decent I can talk to?”

One short haired man and a purple haired woman, both with grass in their hair and red in their faces, shot up into attack positions.

Obito rolled her eyes. “If I did want to attack you I wouldn’t have called out first, now would I?”

“No one ever said you were the sharpest kunai in the post Obito.” Hayate drawled, pulling up his trousers. His companion blanched at the name, stopping in the middle of buckling her belt.


“One and onl-” Obito dodged the slap. “Hey! I’ve only just lost the scabs on that cheek!”

“Yugao!” Hayate exclaimed, running forward to grab her hand. “What are you doing?”

”This is the bitch Captain Kakashi has been moping about! He’s been inconsolable!”

“How can you tell?” Hayate asked curiously as Obito ducked under his arm to clutch at Yugao’s still undone shirt.

“Kakashi? Is he okay? Out of hospital? Are his teammates okay without him in the field?” She demanded.

Yugao shoved at her. “He hasn’t been in hospital for weeks, not with the sole missions he’s been running. He’s still waiting while his new team is decided on.” she frowned at Obito. “Good thing to, since he’s so distracted he couldn’t lead a mission if he tried- are you crying?”

“No. Only a little. Shut up.” Obito choked, burying her face in Yugao’s chest. “It’s been a tough couple of days. He told me I put him in hospital.”

“Who told you?” Hayate asked, passing Yugao her gloves. “What are you doing out here?”

”Danzo.” Obito sniffled as Yugao pushed her away, “He tricked me into going to Suna- thought Kakashi’s team needed help. I’m so happy he’s safe.”

“Right, you went to Suna. All by yourself, to help an ANBU team. Sure you did.” Hayate said, pulling on his flak jacket.

Still sniffing Obito unsealed her toad mask, Goat’s blood and sand still stuck to it. Yugao blinked and took it hesitantly. “Only Lord Jiraiya, the Toad Sage can authorise a Toad mask issued. I’d say it was a fake but it’s got the same weight as my mask.” She said turning it over, “Same placement of the application wax.” She sniffed as the wide lips of the mask. “Same poison pill baked into the mouth.”

Obito blanched at that. No one had warned her about that. If she had cracked the mask in that spot or accidentally bit it while speaking she could have killed herself.

Hayate picked up one of the swords and held it in a relaxed grip, though his eyes narrowed suspiciously. “I think we better escort you to the Hokage, Obito. Let’s get this whole matter cleared up.”

“That’s what I want, you don’t have to point a sword at me.” Obito said crossly trying to take her
"You're not carrying poison while I carry you." Yugao retorted as she tucked away the mask. "Hayate, grab my sword and meet me by the Tower." She crouched on her haunches, gesturing for Obito to get onto her back. "You smell of horse shit and blood." Yugao complained as she stood, bearing Obito's weight easily and running forward towards Konoha.

"You smell of sex but I was going to be polite and not say anything." Obito retorted back as she looped her arms over Yugao's chest. Then Yugao took to the trees and Obito had to focus on holding on. Yugao was faster than any other shinobi that had carried her before.

They arrived at the roof of the Hokage tower in record time, unchallenged by any shinobi on the way. Obito unclenched her arms as they landed, but Yugao kept a grip on her legs. "We need an audience with the Hokage urgently! We have a possible breach of security and theft of ANBU resources." Yugao said to the four ANBU guards that materialised around her.

"It's not possible, it's certain! I have proof!" Obito objected, "Put me down!"

"Lord Hokage is dealing with a matter in the lower level of the Tower, all free ANBU were ordered to assemble there." A Crane mask told Yugao, "Leave the prisoner and grab a spare uniform on the way down. It's show of force more than anything else. Lord Hokage is finally doing something about Danzo."

"He knows Danzo sent a team on a mission to Suna to murder Chiyo of the Brewing?" demanded Obito, going back to holding onto Yugao as she tried to put Obito down. "Oh no, I'm going with you for this. I have evidence the Hokage needs to see."

"Like hell you are!" Yugao tried to shake her loose. "This woman was found outside of Konoha with a ANBU mask and that suspicious story about Suna. She needs to be held until the Hokage has time to deal with her!"

"I want to go too!" Obito objected as another ANBU pulled her off.

"I agree with Uzuki on this." One of the squad spoke up, mask familiar to Obito. "I heard this is a spur of the moment rescue mission. It could come to fighting and you look like you've had a rough time already. Let's get you washed and seen to, before you face the Hokage." Hare said nonchalantly. "But no singing."

"Fine." Obito muttered, since Yugao had flickered away the second she was free. "I suppose a little wait can't make too much difference."

*  

Obito was put in a waiting room near the mission desk and Hokage's public office. It was a small simple room, barred and locked but comfortable. She supposed it was where clients waited while their urgent mission requests were processed and assigned to teams. Hare brought her a basin of warm water and a cloth to tidy herself up and a plate of food with a side of medical supplies from the canteen two floors below.

Her body suit had held up well to the strain she had up upon it. Her shawl less so. Obito was going to have to buy new fabric and completely start from scratch for Niomi's anniversary gift. The underwear she would burn, and give Karou money for a new set. The tunic might be salvageable with a lot of cleaning and sewing, but the boots needed to be re-sole. And she was dreading looking at her right leg. She could feel her leg stump had been rubbed raw against the prostatic. All these...
things were nothing compared to the worry about possible imprisonment.

Obito sat and waited with nothing to do but think about what had happened to her over the last three days and what she was going to say. The Hokage had gone to deal with Danzo but she did not know what that meant. Was the Hokage reacting to her false mission or some other line that Danzo had crossed. They said rescue mission, who else had Danzo tricked into stepping into his underground cavern?

And Naruto, what was she going to do about him and knowing why everyone wanted her to stay away from him. Would she admit she knew what he was and how she had found out or keep quiet about controlling Suna’s own jinchuuriki. Obito still wanted Naruto to be in a better place, cared for by someone who wouldn’t care about the demon. Someone like that had to exist somewhere in Konoha.

* 

The audience with the Third Hokage was awful. Minato-sensei frowned down at her in his inauguration photo on the wall and Sarutobi next to it looked old and tired and fed up. Somehow it was Obito’s fault that she went to Suna, her fault that war almost occurred with Suna. Her fault that Danzo went after Kakashi’s eye and Sarutobi had to rescue him and confiscate a powerful bloodline user in Danzo’s personal fraction. Apparently Sarutobi had had the entire situation under control, but Obito’s involvement meant he had to act prematurely, unable to formally charge Danzo with anything.

Obito stared down at her fingers clenched tight around her shawl and said nothing in her defence. She had heard so many different versions of the truth, from Danzo and Turtle, her own confused memories preoccupied with the revelations of Naruto. It was hard to look back and know what had actually happened. She had asked to go to Suna. She had been the first to enter the village and Playhouse. Maybe the team had only attacked Chiyo to save Obito from an unseen attack-

Obito shook her head violently, stopping Sarutobi’s threats. “Something you which to add?” he asked sternly.

Obito offered up her shawl, fingers on the storage seals. “With permission Lord Third, I have something to show you.”

* 

Lynx and Turtle’s bodies, clad in Mist hunter-nin uniforms, two scrolls with two very different mission scrolls on Lynx, proved enough to convince Sarutobi to hear Obito’s side of the story. She babbled relentlessly, telling her side of events.

Sarutobi’s glare deepened as he interrupted. “You crashed a puppet into Chiyo of the Brewing and blew it up?”

“I panicked!”

“Then threw yourself off a bat after setting it on fire?”

“Again, panicking. I woke up on the ground on the border between River and Fire country and I used the traders road to get back to Konoha. Hayate and Yugao saw me and decided I was suspicious and brought me here.” Obito summed up, slumping back in her chair. She left out the whole incident with Gaara and Ichibi. She was in enough trouble.

Sarutobi gave her a deeply sceptical look. “You got in and out of Suna unspotted, and invited into
their most prestigious establishment, to sew on buttons?"

Obito tried to explain, “Well you use illegal immigrants to clean your office windows…” His glare made her close her mouth. The room echoed with silence as Obito stared at her hands and Sarutobi frowned. When a Chuunin entered with an armful of files, she glanced around nervously as she put them by the Hokage’s side and started when she saw Obito. The ink stains were on her cheek today, but she was still recognisable as one of the shinobi Obito had involved in editing Icha Icha. She said nothing and left the office quickly.

Sarutobi didn’t look up as he paged through various files. Obito looked at the three pictures behind him on the wall. His predecessors and his onetime successor. Minato-sensei looked old in his inauguration picture. None of his gentleness or compassion in his eyes, only determination and steel. This was after Obito’s loss and Rin’s death, after he wiped out a battlefield singlehandedly. When he stopped being Minato-sensei and became the Yellow Flash. When he sent his remaining 13-year-old student to join the ANBU. Obito glared at the picture. Minato-sensei sealed a demon in his motherless son and died, leaving Naruto to the mercy of a village the demon had just devastated. She was running out of excuses for her teacher’s actions.

Sarutobi cleared his throat and Obito turned her attention back to the current Hokage, frowning over paperwork.

“Your file paints an unstable picture of you of late, Obito Uchiha. Since your return to the village almost three years ago you’ve had irregular doctor visits and you never took up the offered therapy. You worked for a time as a civilian mediator on the village’s payroll but quit without notice 8 months ago. You refused treatment after your attempted kidnapping and were marked down as uncooperative during the interview. Your last evaluation for assessment was rescheduled four times on your behalf, but you never came for any of them. The only set of records you have in order is your pension fund. You draw your full payment every month, the day it is available.”

Obito let all this information wash over her. She had never heard of any offer of therapy ever, outside of talks with her aunt and informal meetings with other veterans. She went to every medical appointment she knew about and sometimes turned up at the hospital only to be turned away, having got the wrong date or time. The clan had told her she was a mere receptionist at the police station, not a mediator and that her pay came out of the clan’s reluctant coffers. She hadn’t received any notification of assessment at all, she didn’t even know what she was being assessed for. Her pension was an ongoing battle with the veteran office and bank, her files and documentation always going missing or new requirements suddenly being needed, forcing her to often lose her monthly payments.

She swallowed. Sarutobi looked at her expectantly, waiting for her to talk. Obito gathered herself.

“I have never got any offers of therapy, any appointment dates for debriefing or interviews for assessment. I have no idea what I’m being assessed for, I was last told my medical records have me down as barely capable of walking. I manage to get my hands on my pension money two months out of three and there are always complications with my file or new documents needed that I had no knowledge of.”

“There are systems in place to prevent-“

“I sent you 4 letters this month about Naruto, did you receive any of them?”

“Naruto? I’m not talking about-”

“Lord Third, did you receive any letter from me?” Obito insisted, treading the very edge of rudeness.
“I have secretaries that sort through my correspondence. It takes them time to bring my attention to unimportant post.”

“I would think an Uchiha demanding answers about the Yellow Flash’s son would be considered important.” Obito said. She felt light headed. As if someone else was talking so rudely to the great God of Shinobi. “Maybe someone else read them and decided it was too much risk, that I was too much of a threat to live. That it was the perfect time to end the problems a crippled Uchiha with a transferable Sharingan cause Konoha. Since messing with my pension and medical documents wasn’t causing me enough strain.”

Someone like Danzo, went the unsaid accusation.

“Danzo has been punished for his actions and his connections to ANBU ended. But he is not the only one who could be blamed for interfering with your affairs. At the last council meeting, there were many vocal calls that your eye be transplanted into a jounin level shinobi, ending the invasions Konoha bear from bloodline hunters.”

“What?” Obito jerked, setting off the aches in her shoulder and neck. “Why wasn’t I warned?”

Sarutobi waved a hand tiredly. “It no longer matters, in dealing directly with Danzo I will have to sit in on the next council meeting and officially order the matter dropped. Incurring ire from all for taking away their power to make their own decisions. I will have to stay out of council affairs for months until their pride recovers.”

“You are the Hokage, your orders should be obeyed without hesitation!”

“Really? And if I were to order you to stay away from Naruto Uzumaki and never speak of him again. Would you do that?”

Obito was silenced. She looked down at her lap, at the shawl bunched between her hands. She couldn’t speak, either answer was impossible.

“Would you obey me without hesitation, Obito?” Sarutobi ruthlessly demanded.

“I-“ Obito swallowed and looked up again, “I would try, my lord. Because you are Hokage and deserve my obedience.”

Sarutobi nodded sagely. “Your own teacher gave one last order, just before he died. A law I was forced to make secret due to the problems it caused. Do you know that law?”

Obito closed her eyes in despair. “Was is something about keeping Naruto’s identity secret?”

Sarutobi snorted, “Of course not. Nothing as sensible as that. Has Jiraiya told you what a jinchuuriki is?”

Obito pulled the same wide-eyed look she had used to lie to Chiyo and her brother. “I read a scroll about them, but he took it away from me. I know Kushina was one if that’s what you need me to know.”

“Minato died sealing the Kyuubi into Naruto. With his last breath, he ordered that his son’s burden be known throughout the village and he be seen as a hero.”

“What?!“ Obito exclaimed. The guards in the corners of the room tensed and reached for weapons. But Obito didn’t pay them any notice, busy gaping in shock.
With a grim smile Sarutobi continued, “Your teacher gave an order, expecting it to be obeyed, unthinking of the consequences. And Naruto suffered for it, so much so that I had to repeal Minato’s law and forbid anyone speak openly of how the Kyuubi was dealt with. Naruto’s foster mother was killed during an attempt to kidnap him when he was eight months old. No one trustworthy was prepared to take him in after that. I had to order that he be given a place in a village funded orphanage but I cannot order the ostracism and fear to stop.”

Obito felt tears falling onto her hands, though she didn’t sob. If she started sobbing she would never stop.

“Lord Third.” She implored, “What would you have me do? I can’t turn my back on my teacher’s child. I can’t keep silent while he suffers with a burden he does not deserve. There must be someone who can care for him”

“You’ve broken a dozen or more laws these last three days. My advice to you might be harsh.”

“I am ready to face the consequences of my actions.” Even as she vowed to have her revenge on Danzo and Turtle, she acknowledged she had been acting for her own selfish reasons, going on the mission to Suna. She deserved any punishment she was given.

“Very well.” Sarutobi slowly stood and put on his formal hat of office. Obito stood and braced herself as all four Hokage’s looked down at her in judgement.

“I am moving your records and identification from Civilian control to Shinobi, under direct supervision of a single Tower worker. Your files will be redone and watched closely. Any further tampering or falsifying will be dealt with harshly.”

Obito started to smile, that sounded promising.

“But,” Sarutobi continued sternly, “Obito Uchiha. If you are ever caught willingly leaving this village or in any way risk your eye falling into enemy hands, I will blind you myself.”

Obito smile evaporated and she started to bow in acceptance. “Wait. I’m not finished.” She straightened.

Sarutobi looked at her fully, eyes more alert and focused than they had been before. “I believe you mean well, asking after Naruto. But it would be cruel to allow him to become attached to a person in so much danger herself. Jiraiya tells me you work hard at your seal training. That what you lack in talent you make up for with effort and ingenuity.”

Obito wasn’t sure if she should nod or not at that. She kept quiet.

“You will be offered one final chance for assessment on if you qualify for apprenticeship in the sealing arts. Prove yourself and you may work towards becoming a Seal master. That should keep you out of trouble for a few years until the interest in your eye had died down. When you become a legal adult, capable of defending yourself and others in your charge, we will revisit the matter of Naruto. Perhaps you can be his sealing tutor. You are dismissed.”

Chapter End Notes
Recap, because even I got confused with all the different plans and lies by the end of this.

- Obito thought she was on a spy mission to make sure Suna was stable and able to uphold its side of the treaty.
- Root team original mission was to kill Chiyo and make it look like Mist did it. Obito was a late addition to frame the Uchiha clan too, they would have killed her, taken her eye and raced back with it after killing Chiyo.
- Danzo did have a second summoning contract made to get Obito back, that’s what woke her up in the desert. She resisted it without noticing. Danzo assumes she’s locked up or caught by Suna and moves on to attempt two to gain a sharingan. More on how that went next chapter!

Spoiler: Kakashi may have gained an adorable little tree growing Kouhai, but he’s not happy.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

After all the excitement and drama, Obito has to face the consequences of her actions. They involve paperwork, medic-nin and confrontation. Because oddly, Kakashi is not okay with her going off to Suna or dealing with Danzo.

In the face of all the judgement, Obito considers just falling into line and doing what her clan expects of her.

Chapter Notes

Betaed by the hardworking and long suffering YuliaLeafhill

This is a Naruto fanfic so do I really need to warn you about flashbacks within flashbacks? Promise I won't write them often.
(the tenses are so hard to keep straight)

Obito very slowly became aware of her surroundings, and looked around the small study she found herself in. Her last clear memory was the Hokage passing his sentence, forbidding her any contact with Naruto until he needed a seal tutor. That could be ages, years. Naruto needed someone now. Obito had been so caught up in not screaming at the leader of her village, or worse crying at his feet and begging, that she hadn’t given much attention when someone had gently lead her out of the office and somewhere else in the tower. It had been hard enough to cope with all that, without the other information Sarutobi had inflicted on her.

Her thoughts wandered in aimless circles and her body decided to remind her of the strain she had put it though in the last three days. Had it only been three days since Danzo tricked her into going to Suna? Did she really mess up her life that badly in such a short amount of time? Her family were probably freaking out over her absence, on top of everything else. Obito had stayed in the numb portion of her mind for a long time, until she knew she couldn’t put off reality any longer. And now she found herself in a study she did not recognise.

The Chuunin that had delivered Obito’s files to the Hokage smiled at Obito soothingly, making tea on the desk between them. “Sorry, but you were about to walk out to public mission room.” She said quietly, long dark braid bobbing in time with her whisking hand. “So I guided you to my office instead. I know something secret happened with you and I thought- I thought you could use a drink after your ordeal.”

Obito nodded, not really hearing the words. She watched the tea making with detached interest, noting the plump Chuunin was nice enough to sip deeply from both cups and prove they weren’t poisoned before letting Obito pick one of them for herself.

“Well,” said Obito taking a cup. “I guess that’s that.” She was never leaving the village alive again.
Unless she publicly blinded herself and somehow got the news to spread to other villages. Or somehow made enough of a show of strength to make her eye not worth the risk.

The Chuunin was talking softly about something. Identity cards and medic reports, judging by the pile of paperwork she had next to her.

Obito thought about going home to change, to try and keep her adventure as secret as she could. Apparently, she had a Fuuinjustu test to take soon. Her family might be happy about that, if they weren’t the ones that tried to keep the news of it a secret from her. Obito couldn’t see how having a licenced Fuuinjustu student in the clan was bad, but clearly Obito didn’t know anything.

The Chuunin was frowning over a list of something, paging through a file and pulling out various pages, trying to match them to the list. The file had Obito’s name on it.

“Oh!” Obito exclaimed. “You’re sorting out my file. That’s nice.” She liked this Chuunin, had liked her from the moment she lent Obito a pen and helped her edit Icha Icha all those weeks ago. It felt like Obito had been a different person then, with Kakashi and obliviously happy.

The Chuunin put down her pen slowly and looked at Obito closely. “I told you that about an hour ago, Uchiha-san. You nodded as if you understood.”

“I did?” It had felt like she had only been here a few minutes. Her tea cup was cold and empty. But she didn’t remember drinking more than a sip.

“Okay.” The Chuunin carefully gathered up the paperwork and put in a blank file box, tucking it under her arm. “You’re going to see a medic-nin now. I don’t think you should have even seen the Hokage without a proper check-up first. I’m certainly not going to make you sign documents until I know you’re legally sound of mind.”

“Are you calling me stupid?” Obito slammed her hands on the desk. “Listen you-”

“Kyoko. Kyoko Yamato.” Kyoko offered Obito a smile. “And I know you’re not stupid, but only because I’ve met you before. Which is why this whole situation concerns me.”

* *

Kyoko gently led Obito down to the small medic ward attached to the Tower, where they were told to wait, despite Kyoko insisting it was urgent and waving her work ID at the bored looking guard. Kyoko was just on the point of commanding, when a yell came from within the ward.

“Let them in Otter!”

Otter wordlessly stepped aside, and Obito and Kyoko walked through triumphantly.

Owl meet them with a wordless handwave, gesturing from Obito’s rank hair to her scabbed face and the dry blood all over her dirty bodysuit. He seemed too indignant to speak.

“I don’t need chakra healing.” Obito said defensively. Her injuries were superficial cuts and sprains and swelling, nothing compared to her chronic injuries. She was in pain, but didn’t need urgent care. Just months of physical therapy to get back to the fitness level she had been a week ago.

An imperious finger pointed to an examination bed. Clearly Owl thought otherwise. She reluctantly
walked to the bed and winced as Owl darted around the room gathering an arm full of medic supplies. “Strip!” he ordered, running a hot tap under a large bowl.

“This is all so sudden. I had no idea you felt that way.” Obito blustered, more uneasy about him seeing her scars than her nudity. He had healed her last time, but that had only been her stomach and abdomen. Her legs were unsightly at the best of times.

“I feel nothing but irritation and obligation towards you.” Owl assured her. “I just want to check you over before you have a shower. Make sure you won’t pass out in the next hour.”

“Why are all medics so short tempered.” She muttered, undoing the shawl around her neck.

“Because we have to deal with you!” Owl called, his head in a cupboard.

“I need a full assessment of her long-term injuries.” Kyoko announced riffling through her file box, unconcerned with Owl’s tone or actions. “And to do that all her healable injuries must dealt with.”

“You have the clearance to authorise medical ninjutsu on a civilian?” Owl stopped digging in the cupboard to look at Kyoko. “Not just for life threatening injuries?”

Kyoko held up her tower ID, the metal disc of her rank as bright and official as her shinobi headband. “I’ll stamp whatever you need to authorise a full healing and in-depth assessment.”

Owl nodded and put down most of the medical supplies he had gathered. “I have a copy of my assessment the last time Obito was in my care, when I put in a request for further chakra healing. I’ll get it out for you to stamp now.” He turned off the tap and put the bowl of water and clean clothes next to Obito on the examination bed. “Why aren’t you naked yet?”

“I can’t undo the rest of the clasps.” Obito admitted reluctantly. The dirt encrusted frog hooks required more dexterity than her numb fingers could manage. Owl undid her bodysuit front without comment, then pulled the privacy curtain closed, leaving her to strip and wash while he gave Kyoko the report.

“Why wasn’t your request granted when you first sent it in?” Obito heard Kyoko ask as she slowly wriggled out of her dirty bodysuit.

“They blamed the Hyuuga medic involved in Obito’s treatment. She refused to sign off unless she could be there to watch out for her. Seemed to think a former Prisoner of War would need a friendly face at her side when a bunch of strangers stuck her with needles and chakra.”

“That’s reasonable enough.”

Obito got the bodysuit off her torso and slowly washed herself. She wished for time and water to wash her hair, but made do with what she had.

“I agreed with the Hyuuga, but the hospital got all uppity about an ANBU medic and private medic interfering and nixed the whole damn thing. Here, sign your black op number on every page and we’re good.” Kyoko sounded very competent as she said that, scratching and papers turning announcing that she was arm deep in paperwork.

Obito put a hospital robe over her head and tried to shift herself out of the bottom part of the bodysuit. Dried blood made it stick in places. She only had it down to her knees when Owl
announced he was coming in.

Owl paused at the sight of Obito’s bloody knee stump, worn raw from the nonstop friction of three days against the prosthetic straps. Her inner thighs were chafed from horse riding and her foot was blistered from toes to heel. Very slowly Owl knelt and carefully helped Obito out of the last bit of the bodysuit. When it was finally off he stood showing Obito his empty gloved hands. “I’m going to tell you what I’m doing the whole way through, alright? I’m not putting you to sleep unless you request it and if you tell me to stop I'll stop. I swear it.”

Obito sighed. “Fine.”

“Anything you want to ask before we begin?”

“Yes.” Obito forced herself to ask. “About two weeks ago, did Kakashi come in for any injuries he needed treated? Serious ones on his stomach and broken ribs? Maybe a damaged nose?”

“That’s confidential information, but I can say he’s been mostly unharmed this month compared to the past. And all the ANBU serving medics know to watch him for concealed injuries.”

Obito nodded. A tiny sliver of her guilt disappeared. She hadn’t hurt Kakashi severely, at least not physical.

*

The healing took longer than expected. Owl healed most of her open wounds and sprains with ease, calling out what he found of her more permanent injuries for Kyoko to write down at the desk she had commandeered for her files. The Owl found some internal head damage over her left ear and started cursing. Obito was half conscious by then and listened to Kyoko authorising Owl to continue the lighter healing while she went to find someone to stand as Obito’s proxy since she couldn’t consent to more strenuous healing with a head wound. Obito found just enough energy to call out: “Not my family, they’ll get mad.” Before she drifted off into a painless and exhausted sleep.

*

Obito didn’t open her eyes when she woke up. She didn’t give any indication that she was awake. She really didn’t want to deal with the source of brooding chakra next to her. She really should have specified ‘not her family or any justifiably angry teammates who didn’t need to know what she had been up to.’

“I know you’re awake.” Kakashi told her, voice cold.

Obito felt her cheeks redden, but kept up her pantomime of sleep. She wasn’t ready for this confrontation.

“Owl says a couple more hours and the internal bleeding could have caused a stroke.” There was movement by her side, a hand smoothing the blanket by Obito’s side but not actually touching her. “He guesses it was caused by a hard impact with a surface. Exocularated by jostling and constant motion.”

Obito’s fall from Turtle’s summon, landing hard enough to knock her out. Then a ride on a demon, limping on the trader’s route and another ride on horseback. She had put down the fuzziness and lack of concentration down to stress and strain, not injury. Good thing Owl had done a scan of her head,
otherwise who knows what would have happened, what could have slipped her attention.

Wait.

Obito sat bolt upright, eyes wide with realisation. She scanned the quiet medical room quickly, noted only a startled Kakashi in the room with her, then made a grab for the bedside table, picking up the first reflective surface she could reach. She hefted the half full water jug into her lap and gazed down onto its metal handle, activating both her eyes.

Two murky Sharingan stared back up at her. She still had them both. Owl hadn’t noticed anything odd with her transplanted eye and Danzo hadn’t sent someone else to take her original. Obito let out a breath of relieve and cuddled the jar to her chest, letting her eyes relax back to black. They were still safe, for now.

Turtle had wanted to take her eyes. Turtle had been told to take her eyes. Danzo had wanted to frame her family. How was she supposed to carry on with her life with that knowledge?

Reluctantly Obito forced herself to look at her silent teammate. Kakashi looked at her with both eyes, deeply unimpressed at her antics. He was dressed in his ANBU uniform, a new Rat mask clipped at his waist. Fresh additions to his tattoo and collar marked him as a captain.

“Congratulations on the promotion,” Obito finally said, loosening her grip on the jug.

The stress lines in the corners of Kakashi’s eyes deepened and he stiffly reached out and took the jug from her with one hand, putting it back on the table with more force than necessary. “Congratulations on not being dead or blinded.” He said leaning forward. “Now show me what happened and why you thought it a smart idea to go to fucking Suna.”

Obito flinched, more due to the swearing than the tone. Kakashi didn’t swear often and it meant something that he had been brought to do so. She looked up at him from the corner of her eyes. “Is it safe?” she asked, meaning that her condition wouldn’t affect him when she transferred her memories.

“It’s a little late to be worried about safety.” He snipped. Then his mismatched eyes softened fractionally. “I have my people watching the door and windows. Owl has you down in the ward records under a false name and that Tower worker of yours was last seen trapping your real records with a disturbing amount of paper bombs. You’re as safe as you can be.”

Obito nodded. “Does my family know anything?”

“A message was sent to Fugaku-san in your handwriting, saying you have been frantically studying for your Fuuinjutsu exam set to be written today.” Kakashi paused at the look of terror Obito took on. “This is a lie of course, to explain your four days of absence. You are going to return to the Compound this evening with a failure mark just high enough to grant you retesting in two months.”

Terror was replaced by bitter resignation. Her family would never let her hear the end of that.

“Let’s get this over with.” Kakashi interrupted her thoughts. “Then I can leave.”

Obito looked at him. Her apology was stuck in her throat. She had no idea how to start apologising for her actions, they were so many and so serious. She had hurt him. Hurt him when he had only wanted to protect her.
Biting her lips Obito nodded, and activated her original eye with a single thought. She sat up and leaned towards Kakashi, readying her memories to be transferred to his Sharingan. Kakashi, by contrast, had to use hand signs and a visible amount of concentration to activate his Sharingan. It spun to life slowly and Obito matched its motions easily, syncing their eyes to spin in tandem.

“There’s a lot. Should I give you the first day first, or the time spent in Suna?” she asked belatedly. They had done this Uchiha technique before, but only with single memories of a few minutes. Days’ worth of memories was difficult to transfer, even between two Uchiha with all their eyes working.

“Just send me all of it.” Kakashi ordered. He leaned towards her, but they were still too far apart. Obito braced herself and leaned further, starting the transference as soon as she was close enough to see nothing but her old eye filling her vision.

“I have eyewitness accounts of you attacking a jounin of Konoha! You drew the blood of out the village’s finest, making it impossible for him to fulfil his duties.

Her face went numb when she saw the list of injuries. Broken ribs, bruised lungs, multiple bruises all over his stomach. She paged over frantically, to see the attached pictures. And swallowed back bile as the pictures matched the descriptions. Worse, she instantly recognised the body in the pictures as Kakashi’s. The stomach and chest, both bruised purple and green, were the same ones she had gently stroked a month ago.

Another swallow to hold back vomit and Obito forced herself to look up at Danzo’s judging face. “I— I didn’t mean to.” she said in a small voice.

“Your family are police. How many times do you suppose they’ve heard that from abusive partners?”

“NO.” Obito dropped the file and looked at him desperately. “I didn’t hit him that hard! I know I didn’t. I- he-” She couldn’t control her breath. Her hands were shaking. She tasted vomit in her mouth. “HE DIDN’T FIGHT BACK.” She grasped at reasons not go insane. “Kakashi could have stopped me easily, I couldn’t have hurt him like this!”

Danzo raised an eyebrow. “There are strict laws against shinobi partners hurting their civilian partners. Especially disabled ones. I suppose he knew if he raised a hand, and accidentally hurt you in return, he would have been stripped of his new rank.”

“No.” Obito turned and clutched the side of the walkway, staring down at the darkness below. “I wouldn’t have let that happen.” she whispered. “It was my fault. All my fault.”

“Of course, you have no rank to be stripped of.” Danzo said carelessly, clicking his fingers. A different ANBU reappeared and picked up the fallen medical report, put it into Danzo’s waiting hand and flickered back into the dark. “But injuring an ANBU operative so badly he is hospital bound for weeks, that can’t go unnoticed. Even for a damaged veteran, such things must be punished.”

“Yes. Of course.” Obito sank down to her knees and bowed. “I will take any punishment you see fit. Is he… Is Kakashi going to be alright?”

“Only time will tell. The real tragedy is his squad, sent out to complete a mission without him.”

“I don’t care about myself.” Obito said quietly, taking the scroll. “Just make sure Kakashi doesn’t suffer for my actions.”
Obito tried to pull out of her memories here, wanted to explain herself, horribly aware that she was letting her feelings and thoughts leak through to Kakashi, not just the actions that had happened. But she couldn’t break out of the memories, stuck in the reliving of her mission preparations, her time with Kamo and her arrival with the false ANBU team. The thoughts she had about the team, how professional and cold they were, how suitable Kakashi must find them, would have made her flinch if she had any control over her body.

Unerringly her memories flowed on, through her infiltration of Suna, the Playhouse and near escape out, only to turn back to rescue the Root team. They showed danger of that situation, the escape with Turtle and her attempted eye theft. It all was passed on to Kakashi, complete with her feelings and thoughts, all laid bare to him.

At the point of her memories where Obito flung herself off the flying bat summon she finally managed to blink her eye and break the transference. She couldn’t risk Kakashi seeing her dreams, her meeting with Gaara. There was too much of her past wrapped in that meeting, her escape from Iwa that she had told no one in Konoha.

But when her eye opened again she was still looking into an active Sharingan, still connected to Kakashi through strings of chakra and memory. The Seal she had stitched onto his cheek was activated, sucking greedily at her chakra. They hadn’t transferred memories since she gave Kakashi the chakra storage Seal, Obito remembered. She had designed that Seal to absorb chakra and channel straight to the eye. It must be why they had lost control of the technique she realised, as a new memory streamed between them. But it wasn’t hers.

He walked down the abandoned laboratory, trusting Tenzo to guard his back as well as any real ANBU. Tenzo had proved himself a loyal comrade, if adorably naive when it came to manipulation. Though he did seem to be more on edge than he had been on previous missions. Perhaps being in a lab of Orochimaru, like the one he had been experimented on, brought on unpleasant memories?

The lab was unpleasant, dark and undisturbed, remains of Orochimaru’s experiments left to rot. How many more of them were there within Konoha, and why hadn’t anyone noticed how twisted Orochimaru had become. Would Konoha ever be free of the taint he had left in the shinobi ranks? 60 children had been snatched for a single experiment, who knew how many more had died because no one had dared to question the Hokage’s favourite.

When Tenzo attacked him from behind it was a shock, yet easy enough to evade his wood style jutsu. It was clear Tenzo wasn’t putting his heart into the fight and Kakashi held back as well in order to find out what was going on.

“Comrades shouldn’t fight! Whatever this is about, whatever mission you’ve been sent on. There’s no reason to risk a fellow shinobi.” As always Obito’s voice echoed in his head as he repeated her words, “Those that fail a mission are trash, but those that abandon their comrades? They are worse than trash!”

Tenzo threw Kakashi’s beliefs back in his face, still sending wooden vines after him, disrupting the lab around him. “You’re one to talk. You’re the one who killed a friend aren’t you? Friend Killer Kakashi!”

Kakashi flinched at that, he had hoped Tenzo didn’t know about his awful mistakes, his failures. “I won’t kill a friend.” Not again, not after Rin.

He dodged and finally drew his sword about to go on the offensive. “To hell with your mission. I’ll
say it again, killing a friend is not a mission!” He shifted ready to attack. Tenzo looked distraught but he wasn’t holding back any longer, as numerous wooden senbon caught Kakashi all over the arm, stalling him while he pulled them out.

“Then why did you kill her? Why did you kill Rin Nohara!” Tenzo’s voice seemed so young. Like Rin’s had been when he killed her.

Unwillingly his mind went back to that awful moment he had failed everything he held dear, the day he failed to do the one thing Minato-sensei and Obito had asked of him.

“Ka-Kakashi.” Rin gasped as her heart beat futilely against his hand. His blood covered hand. Chidori fizzled out and he was left alone, with the last of his pack dying on his arm. All he could see was her dying face, her emptying eyes-

“I know you didn’t want to kill her!” Obito’s voice came from far away, almost blocked by Rin’s dying rasp of his name. “I know what happened. It’s not your fault!”

Rin’s corpse faded away. Kakashi was facing a crying Obito, confronting him about his habit of wasting hours at the hero’s stone, punishing himself for his mistakes. “I don’t know how to get this through your thick skull! It’s not your fault, none of this is your fault. You are not to blame. I don’t hate you, I’ve never hated you. I’m glad you’re alive and I want you to live and fight and continue to do good!”

I’m glad you’re alive
I want you to live
And fight
And do good!

Kakashi came back to himself, looked at the shaking, conflicted Tenzo. He let out a breath and all his anger and sorrow with it. “I didn’t want to kill her. Rin chose to die to save Konoha. She was a true hero and I won’t let you sully her name!”

He would have beaten the floor with Tenzo, but then a leftover undying snake experiment interrupted and Kakashi was obliged to blow it up repeatedly. He felt much better after that.

Of course Tenzo totally missed Kakashi’s point about being comrades and having each others back by going off to face Danzo alone. Kakashi told Hawk and Badger to warn the Hokage then went after Tenzo deep into the caverns of Root. He found Tenzo restrained, a soot covered woman in a half melted Turtle mask next to him.

“How convenient. We were just speaking of you, Hatake.” Danzo was unphased to see him. “It seems I was too late to take your old teammate’s eye, Suna has already done so. But I can still save yours from their clutches.”

The world tilted. Kakashi hadn’t given Obito’s safety a thought, never even considered Danzo would go after her…”What did you do!” he yelled.

Tenzo and the other Root operatives flinched. Danzo frowned. “I haven’t laid a hand on the Uchiha, her family have seen fit to take her eye before she is sent to Suna for marriage. Apparently they considered her own choice of suitors unsuitable and found a better alliance in Suna. Under our treaty no Sharingan user may enter Suna, so they-” Danzo made a hooking motion with a finger, “found a way around that clause. They’ll come for your eye soon enough and I can’t allow that-“ he thumped his cane on the ground and the hall was filled with Root operatives.
There was a part of Kakashi that was screaming but he ignored it with easy practice. Another part of his mind was calculating how fast he could get to Suna and if he could save Tenzo first...

Fortunately the Hokage himself appeared between them, half the true ANBU forces gathered on the roof beams above him. “That’s strange, Obito Uchiha is waiting at the Tower to speak to me and my informants tell me she still had two eyes.”

Kakashi scanned the row of ANBU above him, even as he moved to defend Tenzo from an attack from the injured Turtle masked Operative, who is now leaking killing instinct. He had a sudden suspicion as to who set the woman on fire.

Danzo, typically, doesn’t turn a hair at the revealing of his lies and merely spun another tale, as easily as he breathed. “Then I have been misinformed. I merely sought to save one of our most talented ANBU from permanent injury. Like his former,” He paused for in instant. “teammate.”

Kakashi read the threat within that half second. Danzo knew about their relationship, would see Obito suffer for it if Kakashi pushed for Danzo to be punished. It was a stalemate, for now.

Kakashi held his peace as the Hokage takes Tenzo from Danzo’s control and merely suggested that Danzo disband the rest of his secret army. Tenzo actually thanked Danzo for his training before following after the rest of the true ANBU members, back up into the light.

Hare appeared at Kakashi’s side as the large group disperses back to their usual positions. “Cat found her on the outskirts of the west walls. Travel worn and rundown but uninjured. She claims to have come from Suna and had an ANBU Toad mask.” Hare paused as they landed on the stairwell connected to the Hokage tower. “She is the Toad Sage’s apprentice. It is possible he sent her on an a secret mission—”

“No.” Kakashi interrupted him. “Jiraiya was training her in Fuuinjutsus, not espionage. He would have never agreed for her to leave the village openly or in secret.” And Jiraiya had written to him a week ago complaining that Obito was ignoring his letters. Kakashi had assumed she was just angry about Naruto, he had done nothing about it. Just stewed in his guilt and shame, telling himself he was relieved Obito knew how terrible he was, that he deserved what she had said to him, had always deserved it-

Kakashi dragged himself out of his spiral of blame and self hate reluctantly. Genma had been muttering about therapy again and Kakashi did not have time for that nonsense

“She seemed to think she had been sent to Suna to help an ANBU team. Cat is convinced she went willingly.”

Kakashi’s thoughts froze for a second, piecing together all the conflicting information he had been given and coming up with one plausible response. For a moment all his guilt vanished and he was left with the familiar disbelief that anyone could be that stupid. “That idiot.”

Obito thought for a moment she would fall off the bed, leaning so far over with no strength left to hold herself up, but Kakashi caught her shoulders and gently pushed her back to slump against the pillows. There was sweat on her brow. The transferring of so many memories had exhausted her still recovering body. When she tried to grab at Kakashi’s hand she was too slow.

Kakashi looked shaken under his mask. The malfunctioning Seal had gone back to being invisible,
having filled itself with Obito’s chakra. His Sharingan was off again.

Obito panted as she tried to gather herself. That Danzo was a real piece of work, and Orochimaru was a sick freak for what he had done to poor Tenzo and all the other children. No wonder Shisui was traumatised from having to clean up his labs.

And Kakashi, who was called Friend Killer, whose actions haunted him. Who used Obito’s words to justify his actions. Who refused to kill a friend for a mission, in total opposition to all Obito had thought Kakashi still acted. Obito covered her eyes and willed herself not to cry from the despair and guilt she had felt Kakashi go through.

She took a breath, put down her hands and forced herself to start talking. “I was wrong. I was completely wrong about you and Naruto and your motives. I shouldn’t have been so fast to blame you. And I should have never hit you, not even once.”

“You didn’t hurt me much.” There was distance in Kakashi’s body language, the sharing of his memories too much for his private soul to deal with.

“That’s not the point. People in-,” Obito’s throat tried to close on her, she forced herself to keep talking. “People in relationships, they shouldn’t hit each other. Especially Shinobi, we have enough violence in our lives already.”

“You’re not a shinobi!” Kakashi exclaimed. “I don’t know how you could think you were, after everything that happened to you. You lost your leg! The full movement of your arm and fingers! You are a civilian!” Sheer shock prevented Obito from shouting back. Kakashi had never been this frank with her before. “You’ve done enough for Konoha. It doesn’t matter what you do to me, as long as you don’t get hurt!”

Obito blinked. “Don’t say things like that. It does matter what I do to you. You’re important.”

Kakashi made a frustrating sound and made to get up. “I’m supposed to keep you safe. I’ve failed with everyone else, but I won’t fail with you. I don’t think we should see each other for a while-“

Obito flinched. A slap to the face would have been less painful than that. She tried to stall him leaving her. “Wait! What are we gonna do about Naruto?”

“Naruto? Naruto is fine! He has 24-hour ANBU protection. He’s the safest child in Konoha!”

“Safe isn’t the same thing as fine! He’s in a civilian orphanage! An overcrowded one!”

“Because the shinobi ones refused him! Because he’s a danger to them. It wasn’t always like this. Sarutobi put him with a foster mother at first, his own sister. She was killed in a kidnapping attempt. Poison in their food. Killed her but not the Jinchuuriki.”

Obito gasped. The Hokage had not mentioned that. The Third’s own sister… After losing his wife during the Kyuubi attack along which who knows how many other people.

“I know it’s not ideal.” Kakashi tried to reassure her. “But Naruto is fine. He’ll start the academy in a year or two, be given his own apartment-“

“He’s 3!” Obito was back on solid ground for this argument. “He can’t go to the Academy and he can’t live by himself when he turns 5!”
“Why not? I did at 6.”

Obito fell silent. She had no quick reply to that. She had known, had been told when Team Seven had formed that Kakashi lived by himself, had done so for years. It hadn’t seemed wrong when she was 10, that Kakashi had lived alone since his father’s death. Now, from the wise old age of 17 it seemed insanity. Children shouldn’t live alone. Not orphaned Jinchuuriki and not celebrated genius Chuunin.

She looked at Kakashi, trying to find the right words to argue. But Kakashi’s body language signalled the discussion was over. “Danzo will lay low for a while, he’s in disgrace and being watched. He won’t take any action against you for a while. Go back to the compound and stop being so gullible.”

Obito watched as he made for the door. “Kakashi? Happy birthday. For last week.”

He waved a hand without looking back and left the room. Obito waited until his chakra had left the Tower entirely before letting her tears fall silently down her cheeks.

*

Her cry turned into a long nap, and a short shower later, Obito and Kyoko considered the problem of Obito’s clothing over a plate of rice balls. “My clan will have enough trouble believing I almost passed a Fuuinjutsu exam without me showing up in a blood-spattered battle suit.” Obito sighed.

“We can buy you some new clothing quickly?” Kyoko suggested, working at her abacus with her free hand. Apparently Obito’s finances were too complicated to work out without technical help.

“They’d notice. I never have new clothes, it’s always hand-me-downs. Plus, I never have money…” Obito considered the problem. “I need someone to bring me my own clothing. Someone who would have an excuse to go to my home and get them.”

“Is there such a person?”

“Yes, but I don’t want to be in her debt…”

*

“I don’t want to know.” Hazuki Uchiha interrupted Obito, upon arriving in Kyoko’s study. “I don’t need to know what you got up to or why you needed me to sneak you clean clothes when you were just writing an exam.”

“Spilt coffee?” offered Obito lamely.

Hazuki gave her the patented Uchiha look of disbelief. “You’re not allowed to drink coffee.”

Obito scowled, “That’s why I was drinking it when I had the chance!”

Hazuki snorted and handed over a neat pile of clothing, all dark blue with the Uchiha Clan symbol prominently embroidered. “So you won’t need the underwear and socks I grabbed too-“

“I’m very messy, I got coffee everywhere.” Obito said quickly, taking the offered bundle and starting
“Which explains the new scuff marks on your false leg— Hazuki eyed the prostatic, safely resting in
the chair next to Obito.

Obito held her tongue, struggling to get a bra on under the borrowed jumper of Kyoko’s.

“You keep getting into trouble and your life is going to get very unpleasant very quickly.” Hazuki
sighed and sat down in a visitor’s chair, as Obito flung the wooly jumper aside and put on her button
up shirt. “I should look forward to you taking my place as clan drudge, but you’re so damn likable
Obito. I want to spare you the misery.”

“It’s not that bad is it? Being the clan laundress? With all the washing machines and technology we
have now, isn’t it only the old fashioned stuff you have to wash by hand these days?” Obito
squirmed her way into soft trousers, unwilling to stand up off the bed.

“Child, this is our family. Almost everything the elders wear is old fashioned. And half our jounin
wear their parents’ old kit, and the new gear falls apart after a few machine washes.” Hazuki sighed
and considered her worn out hands, still red and puffy from the washing basin she had abandoned at
Obito’s urgent message. She still wore a plain ring on her left hand, in the strange custom of her dead
husband’s people.

Obito had forgotten the scandal of Hazuki leaving the clan to marry a foreigner, instead of getting her
sweetheart to marry into the clan and take her name. Hazuki and her daughter Izumi had been back
in the clan when Obito had returned from Iwa, Izumi’s father dead in the Kyuubi attack. Obito
hadn’t thought of how the reconciliation had gone for them. She had just assumed they had been
welcomed back with open arms, as she had been. But now the sight of Hazuki’s raw hands, her tired
shoulders made Obito wonder if Hazuki had chosen to return or been forced to.

When Obito finished putting on her coat, Hazuki sprang back into life, and leaned over to straighten
Obito’s collar and pull her clothes to sit neatly. She even brushed back Obito’s hair with her fingers,
is if Obito were Izumi. “This hair of yours.” Hazuki muttered. “It’s not straight or curly. Just messy.
Why don’t you have it lacquered straight?”

“I live with enough pain already, thanks.” Obito muttered, getting her prosthetic leg. “I don’t need to
sit for two hours and have my scalp burnt and hair pulled.”

“I think I’ll come over and style it for you, when you go out with Yashiro.” Hazuki said offhandedly,
pulling Obito’s hair over one shoulder.

Obito dropped her leg. “When I do what?”

“You didn’t think I was going to help you for nothing? I’ve thought of what I want in return for my
continued silence.” Hazuki declared. “You to start seeing my brother, Yashiro.”

“What, no!” Obito stretched her arm to reach her leg. “He’s got two kids already. He’s old!” And
gross. She mentally added. Yashiro was the one who groped her at Naomi’s wedding, right at the
table around their family. She had since been informed that this was usual for Yashiro after the
slightest amount of alcohol in him.

“He’s not that old.” Hazuki objected. “ Barely in his thirties! And his kids are young enough to forget
their mother if he remarries. I know he’s a bit much when he drinks but Yashiro’s a good man and
father. He’s been taken with you for a while now. Besides you could do with a bit of maturity in your life. Three dates with my brother in exchange for my silence about whatever happened here.”

Obito frowned. “One date.”

“Three. I risked a lot to help you, lying to Kamo to get into your house, leaving my chores to find you here.”

“One date, a memory quilt for your husband and I start sewing anti-dirt Seals on the elders’ clothing.”

Hazuki frowned, confliction on her face. “Two dates if he wants another try, one memory quilt and strengthening Seals so I can machine wash clothes instead.”

“Done.”

*

“I will see you in three days, in my office. If I don’t see you by the end of the day I will assume you’ve been locked up somewhere and raise an unholy fuss.” Kyoko said, passing Obito a copy of all her updated ID and pension paperwork. There was still a lot to sort out but Kyoko said it could be done by the time Obito had her Fuuinjutsu exam.

“Thank you Kyoko. For everything. I’m sure you didn’t need to do nearly as much as you did for me today.” Obito tucked the paperwork into a storage Seal. All signs of her excursion had been dealt with. All she had loose in her person was a results paper declaring her 82% allowed her to retake the Seal license exam in two months.

“It was nothing. I enjoy a challenging project. Speaking of which.” Kyoko pulled out a thick stack of cheap paper, stuck together with string. “Do you remember how we met?” She showed Obito the front cover. Come, Then Go Away was the title and under it was a sketch of a scantily dressed woman chasing a scared looking man.

Obito blinked, “That looks a bit like that Icha Icha book we destroyed. Did you fix it back together?”

“Nope. I rewrote it the whole thing. I used the notes you made in the bar and just carried on. I’m getting copies made.” Kyoko patted it gently. “Just a few copies. If you think it’s alright.”

“Uhhhh. Are you sure it’s legal to do that?”

“I checked every law book in Fire Country. As long as we make it obvious it’s not the original, don’t mention the author or original title, no one can really object.” Kyoko blushed around her cheek freckles, “I’m sure only other members of the editing group will want copies, but it would be fun, to print an extra few and give them to friends.”

“Sounds like fun. I’d like a copy for myself, my Aunt will find it hilarious, maybe my Grandfather too. He likes ‘historical dramas’ that happen to have love stories in them. And I owe—“ Obito cut off. She did owe Kakashi a copy, since it was his book he had let her destroy. He let her get away with a lot. Too much. She was bad for him.

“Yeah, go nuts with the printing.” Obito recovered. “I’ll head home now, I guess.”
She walked home very slowly, trying to decide her next move. So she was officially banned from seeing Naruto, Kakashi didn’t want to see her any more, Sarutobi wanted her out of sight and she had a date next week with a gross pervert-

A hand caught her wrist unexpectedly. She hadn’t felt the approach of any chakra, but the grip was a strong one, made of callused fingers and solid palm. Obito knew who it was before she turned to look.

“Hi Gai.” She tried to smile. Her face muscles refused to cooperate.

“Obito!” Gai boomed happily, “I’ve been looking for you for weeks!”

“Oh well. I’ve been busy, so busy. Still busy actually-“

“Let’s go have some dango!” Gai smiled, his teeth glistening in a sudden sunbeam.

“Actually-” Obito tried to pull out of his grip. It wasn’t tight and yet she couldn’t get loose.

“I know a wonderful place!” Gai turned and walked, dragging Obito along. “I’ve wanted to talk to you about your behavior towards my Beloved Rival!”

Not a hint of anger in his tone. And yet, in the back of Obito’s mind there was whimpering. She couldn’t say why but somehow she knew she was in more danger now than she had been the last three days put together.

* 

An hour and an eternity later Obito finally made it to the main gates of the Uchiha clan compound.

“There she is! Long time no see!” Osuma Uchiha, the current gate guard smiled at Obito as she approached. “We were worried about you. How did the exam go?”

Obito burst into tears and flung herself into her distant cousin’s arms.

“I don’t think she did well.” The other guard whispered as Osuma gingerly put his arms around her shaking shoulders. “You owe me a night shift on desk duty.”

Obito sobbed harder.

* 

Fugaku showed up just as Obito was clearing up the dinner plates, Kamo already asleep in his armchair. Fugaku looked as worn out as Obito felt, still in his work clothes and an armful of paperwork under one arm. He collapsed in the chair Obito offered him and drained Kamo’s abandoned whisky without blinking.

“Three days of non-stop studying and you still didn’t pass?” he then demanded.

Obito slumped and hung her head. She had been hearing variations of that statement endlessly since
she returned home a few hours ago.

“No, no.” Fugaku patted her hand, “I didn’t mean to put it like that. At least you earned a second chance.” He pulled out one bulky scroll from among the several he held. “I meant to give you this ages ago when I first heard you were studying Seals. The few Fuuinjutsu manuscripts we rescued from the old compound. We should have kept them underground with the other scrolls but-.” He sighed. “There were a lot of things we should have kept safe.”

He gave Obito the scroll, faded symbol on the wax seal. Obito thought it was the Uchiwa for a minute, then Fugaku moved his thumb covering half of the symbol and Obito realised instead of a single round fan, it was a crescent moon with a small circle next to it. She had seen that symbol before, somewhere.

“Now,” He turned and gave the sleeping Kamo an assessing stare, then turned back and lowered his voice. “Any idea why Sarutobi stuck his nose in and declared any talk of taking your eye was officially over?”

Obito looked at her clan leader, his eye bags deeper than they had been six months ago. She had been angry with him about Itachi, about taking him to a war zone at four and pushing for his promotion to genin at eight. But Fugaku had always had a soft spot for Obito when she was young. Had made a point to keep her included in clan functions others might have preferred the loud clumsy orphan be left out of.

Obito chose to tell him as much of the truth as she dared. “I made a fuss over Naruto, like you told me not to. That creepy councillor Danzo made threats, I panicked and Lord Third stepped in to call him off and lecture me. I’m to keep my head down and my mouth shut until I’m a Fuuinjutsu master, then I might be allowed to teach Naruto Seals.”

She braced herself for Fugaku’s reaction. But he just sighed and picked at the leftovers on the table, stuffing a mouthful of cold food into his mouth. Obito offered him a set of clean chopsticks but he shook his head.

“I promised Mikoto I would be home to eat with the family tonight.” He frowned, looking at the clock on the wall. “And you cannot speak if any of this to her. It’ll just open old wounds.”

Obito nodded. Kushina had been Mikoto’s friend. The fact that she was barred from Naruto’s presence must be a hardship to her. In fact, Obito realised, Mikoto had been the one Uchiha telling her to go talk to the Hokage about Naruto, not just telling her to shut up like everyone else. Mikoto had been trying to help her, though too subtly for Obito to notice.

“I won’t repeat what the Hokage told you. You understand now the reasons you were kept from the boy. You’ve been given the chance of a great honour and I hope you wouldn’t ruin it. Danzo is a danger to us all. He was the one that convinced the council to move us out here to the edge of the village.” Fugaku scowled. “I know he’s the one blocking my budget reforms and making it harder for any Uchiha to be promoted.”

Obito avoided his eyes. “He did seem very keen to take my eye.” Keen enough to frame her for murder and send false ANBU to take her eye, she didn’t say. She didn’t want to be the reason a civil war broke out in Konoha.

“His genin teammate was Kagami Uchiha, Shisui’s father. He’s seen the advantage of a Sharingan in war and peace.” Fugaku closed his tired eyes, thinking deeply. Obito quietly gathered the dishes and
started washing them at the sink. She almost thought Fugaku had fallen asleep like Kamo, when the clan head spoke again.

“You are very important to us Obito. Even if you fail to become a Fuuinjutsu master, we have high hopes for you in the future.”

“Yes, Uncle.”

“Ranma’s been after me to order you married. You know of the council votes you gain when you come of age or marry. They would be incredibly useful in dealing with Danzo on the council.”

“Two of those votes I only get because of Kakashi Hatake.” It hurt to even speak his name now.

“And it was very sensible of him to do so. That’s one reason our elders stopped calling for him to return your eye. He must understand more of clan politics than we suspected.” Fugaku nodded to himself. “If he ever leaves ANBU I might encourage one of our clan to marry him into the clan. We’d lose the Hakate vote if that happens, but the dog summons would be useful. We lost all the canine summons in the second war—”

Obito almost dropped a plate in her shock. She held up the plate and stared into it, trying to read Fugaku’s expression in the reflection. Fugaku continued unconcerned. “-but then again with him becoming captain, that cuts his life expectancy even more. Probably why Ranma is so set to have you married now, so we can use the votes before we lose two with his death.”

Fugaku noticed Obito’s ashen face and smiled reassuringly. “It’s all right Obito. I won’t let anyone force you to marry, I know you suffered in Iwa. We’re not desperate, not yet. Though I was glad to hear about your dinner with Yashiro, he’s a fine sergeant, does good work. I hope that goes well.”

Obito twitched her cheek in a faint attempt to smile. “You are kind to say so.” She lowered her head back to the sink. “Was there another reason we stopped asking Kakashi to return my eye?”

“I had the hope the Hokage would see the value of a Sharingan in ANBU. We could do so much good for Konoha if only they let one of us in. Naomi has started to automatically put forward every Uchiha Chunin and Jounin each time the ANBU recruits. Just one of us in there could make a huge difference.” Fugaku stood up. “But you with a Fuuinjutsu licence would also be good for us. I’ll keep you off the work roster while you study, but then it’s back to your old volunteer shift at the station. You can’t laze about at home forever.”

Obito clenched her teeth to keep from responding to that dig. The full-time job she had held as a civilian mediator was considered just volunteer work? Now she knew where the money Konoha paid for that job had gone: right into the Uchiha clan account. The bastards.

“Take care Obito, my best to Kamo when he wakes.” Fugaku stopped at the door to look at the dozing old man. “You let us know if you need any help with him? There’s no shame in asking family for help to keep a valued elder comfortable and at ease?”

Obito nodded as Fugaku left. This was what she hated about her family. How they could be so matter factly cruel and kind in the same breath. Guilt ing her back into a job they were underpaying her for, then assuring her Kamo would be cared for no matter what. It drove Obito mad.

*
That night Obito did something she had only done a few times in her life: she sat down and tried to plan ahead. She turned to a new page in her Fuuinjutsu notebook and wrote out a list of things to do.

-**Find someone to raise Naruto**

No one was concerned that Naruto was being set to live the loveless lonely life of a living weapon. Everyone seemed to think if he was fed and guarded he’d be fine. Obito could excuse Kakashi for not wanting to go near Naruto. Having to watch your teacher, your last family die while you watched helpless behind a barrier was going leave you shattered and unable to face the brat left behind. Especially when you were only thirteen at the time.

Everyone else involved however, from the Third to Kushina and Minato’s old friends, was on Obito’s shit list. There had to be someone able to care for Naruto. Someone who gave a damn for the child, not the demon in his belly. Couldn’t Jiraiya-

Obito’s thoughts tried to picture Jiraiya caring for a baby or even a toddler. They gave up. It just wasn’t possible. She would be having words with the old man when he next came back to Konoha. He was the one who actively tried to hide Naruto’s existence from her, looked her straight in the face when the subject of Jinchuuriki came up and said nothing.

-**Watch out for Danzo and his minions**

A high council member and advisor to the Hokage had it in for the Uchiha clan in general and Obito in particular. Danzo had a secret squad of ANBU under his command and even with the Hokage telling him to stop interfering in the Village’s running she doubted he would. Obito had grown up around entitled people, who were able to twist orders to suit their own goals. She’d give it a year or so, before Danzo was right back to ordering assassins and subverting the Hokage’s leadership, convinced it was his right to do so. She’d watch her back for Turtle too, who might have taken it personally that Obito set her and her summons on fire.

So: On top of bloodline hunters from outside of the village, she now had to worry about eye theft inside the village too. At least her clan were aware of the threat Danzo posed to them. She’d keep an ear open and see how they dealt with him.

If the Uchiha had more votes in the council Fugaku could overrule Danzo’s moves against the clan. The guilty thought floated through Obito’s mind. *If you were married the clan would have 5 votes to wield against Danzo’s sabotage, not just 2. Aren’t you tired of being selfish?*

She reluctantly added a third note.

-**really try to be serious about marriage**

Obito squeezed her eyes. Pictured herself married to Inabi or Kaoru or Yashiro. Tried to feel something other than despair at the thought of being a house mother, stuck in the Uchiha compound, bound in tradition and raising her own babies and a pack of foster Uchiha children. Maybe if one of them was blonde-

She cut the thought there. No way was anyone letting an Uchiha raise the Jinjuriki. Especially the crippled Uchiha with the vulnerable Sharingan.

Obito breathed in and out, reflexively reaching for her sewing basket. She wanted a project to blot out her thoughts. She forced herself to push back the basket, continue with her planing.
-Pass Fuuinjutsu licence exam  

-Become a Fuuinjutsu master in four years or less  

If she worked hard, Really hard and made herself focus, she could pass the test and earn her Fuuinjutsu licence. That would give her permission to sell her Seals within the village and earn money. Maybe she could pay someone to look after Naruto or have him moved to a foster home. In exchange for her licence she would have to give the village a certain amount of work. Obito didn’t know what duties she could perform but she was willing. Maybe they’d let her wear her shinobi headband again. After gaining her licence she could also work towards earning a mastership rank in Seals. Then she would be allowed to teach, though probably never to travel. She would earn much more money with that qualification.  

-Get private bank account. Don’t give clan access to it. Don’t let clan know you have it.  

Obito had not minded much that she never had much spare cash. The clan paid for all the compound’s utility bills; general groceries and clothing was bought together and distributed where needed. Meals were made in bulk and put into fridges and freezers weekly. Obito appreciated never having to cook unless she felt like it, that her house was cleaned weekly and her laundry magically done every other week. She had understood the clan taking her pension money as payment for these things. If they had told her they were taking her work money too, then she would have understood that too.  

But they hadn’t told her what she was being paid for her work in the police office. They had told her it was simple desk work with an expense account only. Not civilian mediation with a respectable salary paid by the Tower. Her clan had been stealing money from her. They could be the ones behind her pension problems. She couldn’t trust them fully, not any more.  

-Avoid Kakashi. Stop making his life awful  

She blinked back tears at that. That at least should be easy. Gai would help her with that. Just let him avoid her and find other people to care about. Better people, smarter people. Kinder people. People that took his heart seriously and didn’t turn on him for obeying the Hokage’s law.  

People that weren’t Obito Uchiha.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The Huyuuga may be dealing with a kidnapping, but the Uchiha still manage to be the more dysfunctional family, insulting and cheering Obito in the same breath. She almost wishes they'd pick an opinion of her and let her get on with her seal studies. (Maybe if Obito kept her head down she could ignore the ominous signs of trouble brewing all around her.)

Chapter Notes

An update in the actual main storyline? It's more likely than you think! (Now with 60% more Uchiha dysfunctions)
Now betaed to hell and back by the wonderful Yulialeafhill.
Nothing much seems to happen in this fic, but a lot will become relevant later on.

And it's my birthday this week and the second one ever that I don't spend at home, so if you were ever gonna give me comments or fanart or personal theories or any indication at all that I matter NOWS THE TIME.

I'm gonna post my favourite lines in this chapter on my Tumblr (https://jemsquash.tumblr.com/)

Obito might have had her seal license exam coming up but she still had things to do outside of the Compound. Obito wasn’t going to let fear of Danzo or anyone else keep her from her other responsibilities. She still attended her physical appointments with Mariko and her veteran meetings twice a week. In between those commitments she somehow managed to keep on top of the clan’s mending and tailoring and give Kamo more and more attention as his memory continued to fade.

An additional concern were secret meetings with Kyoko, who set up Obito’s private bank account and continued to sort out and monitor Obito’s complicated paperwork. This meant Obito was also kept in the loop with Kyoko’s attempts to book time with the book printers. Konoha’s sole publishing company had to give preference to official documents and books, leading to a long waiting list for fictional books. Kyoko was looking into publishing outside the village, weighing up the extra cost vs the speed and upping the amount of copies she would order all the time, as more and more people expressed an interest in the parody (if they called it that the original author can’t sue them, explained Kyoko) of Icha Icha.

Still, despite all her legitimate responsibilities, Obito found herself looking for more excuses to be away from home. Her clan had taken to trying to help her study in terrible ways. Trying to read her notes and criticise her spelling and penmanship when Obito could read them perfectly, randomly quizzing her about things not in the test or worst of all, tidying her workspace just when she had sorted things to suit her.
Obito fled to the monthly check-up of Anko’s seal and stayed for several hours in her tiny flat enjoying the quiet. Anko, her seal re-purified and smaller than ever, was happy to have the company. She had been returned to duty as a Chuunin but was without direction or goals in her work. Strangely Anko could find no one who was keen to help her hunt down her former teacher and bring his dismembered head back to face trial.

Obito bit her tongue to keep from mentioning Tenzo, or the possibility of there being more victims of Orochimaru among the shinobi ranks. Encouraging the manhunt of an S-level traitor probably counted as not staying out of trouble. Instead, Obito offered to let Anko work out her frustrations by tearing up and setting on fire her practice notes.

“You sure you won’t need these again?” Anko asked poised to rip apart a pile of ink covered papers.

“To master a seal, I have to write it out at least a hundred times.” Obito yawned. “And that’s just the low-level seals, the C-ranked ones you could say. I need to master at least 60 of them for this exam, plus come up with three of my own. I will drown in paper if I don’t start getting rid of my practice sheets.”

“Okay,” Anko ripped the pages in half, then ripped the halves and then the quarters. “I thought you could just copy them with your -,” she gestured to her eyes before reaching for a firelighter.

“Seals don’t depend just on chakra and muscle motions like ninjutsu,” Obito said hunting through Minato’s old notebook for a symbol to add to her light seal. “You have to write a seal exactly right, in the right order with the right focus in your mind. You have to feel it out, know why you’re doing it that way and understand the theory behind it to truly make it work.” She looked up at Anko, cradling the bin with flames coming out of it. “If I used my Sharingan to copy a taijutsu master’s punch, it wouldn’t be anyway as strong or effective as when the master performed the same move. Because they understand the theory and the style behind that punch and their body automatically knows what to do, not just his head. I have to really understand the seal backwards and forwards to consider it mastered.” She looked down at her notes and sighed deeply. “Which means I have to practice until my fingers go numb.”

“Sounds like a lot of work.” Anko stood up to throw her bin of ashes out her apartment’s single window.

Obito hadn’t known it was possible to live in such a small space. The Uchiha compound had apartments in them, but while they were sometimes crowded with two or three people to a bedroom, they weren’t nearly as small as Anko’s single room home. She eyed the bare windows and cupboards around her and added curtains to her already long list of sewing projects. Anko deserved more than bare walls.

“So…” Anko carefully sat down again, not disturbing the various piles of paper surrounding her. “I got a letter from your master, Lord Jiraiya. He says you’re not writing to him anymore.”

“He’s not my master,” Obito muttered, finishing a seal and activating it. A small ball of light floated up from the now bare page. Obito studied it carefully, making sure it was all correct, just like the reading lights Minato-sensei used to make for Team 7 while camping out on missions. He could adjust the brightness with a wave of his hand but so far all Obito could do was make them.

She blew on the light to make it float up to the cracked ceiling, then noticed Anko had gone stiff and still. “What’s wrong?”

“Did…” Anko swallowed and hugged the empty bin closer to herself. “Did he do something? Did he hurt you?”
Belatedly Obito realised that Anko would be upset to know a student and master were fighting. Of course she would.

“It’s nothing serious,” Obito said softly. “I found out about a stupid decision Jiraiya made years ago, that he hid because he knew I’d disagree with him. I’m not communicating with him until he gets back so I can scream at him in person.” She smiled reassuringly. “It’s a personal matter, nothing serious, I promise.”

Anko still frowned. “He sent the letter with a toad, it made me think…I don’t know if I can still call on the snakes for stuff.”

Obito wrote out the light ball seal again, thinking about the meaning behind Anko’s words. Animal summons were a big deal, a backup invaluable to a lone shinobi. If Anko had a chance of the snakes still obeying her she would be forced to use them, no matter how much trauma and prejudice were now attached to them.

“I don’t see why the snakes wouldn’t obey you If you already proved yourself to them and signed a contract they have to obey you. Do you have any particular snake you work with or is it a random summoning?”

“Random.” Anko swallowed. “What if it tells him. What if he spies on me through them. What if people think I’m still loyal to him, because I use snakes.”

“People will understand,” Obito said taking the ball of light she had just created and moving to Anko’s side. “Animal summons are just another tool. No one will think less of you for who else is using them.”

But even as she said that she thought of Gai and his father, how people talked about them before Gai became a Jounin, how people reacted to her scars sometimes, how the words ‘Friend Killer’ and ‘Son of White Fang’ had started to haunt her dreams.

“Okay.” Obito swallowed, kneeling next to Anko. “I see your point. People are idiots sometimes.”

Anko laughed hollowly. “Only sometimes?”

“So why don’t you just get a new summon then?”

Anko slumped down against the wall, sprawling so her feet touched the other side of the apartment wall. “Oh yes, like that’s easily done.”

Obito tilted her head. “Yes? Sometimes it takes a while to find the right match and get the animals to agree. But usually, it works after you ask four or five different groups…”

Anko stared up at her. “You’re serious.”

“My clan has about four dozen animal summons in our records. Only ten or so are in use now. They need a lot of attention to work right and most of my family prefer tools that don’t argue back.” Obito counted off the summon contracts she knew. “The cats like to have multiple summoners, but they’re fussy and hate me. They’ll refuse you if I’m the one to introduce you to them. The hawks are very prideful but work well for bribes of meat. The hummingbirds can all talk, which is useful but not good for stealth missions and are useless in spring. Oh wait!”

Anko stared at her, mouth now hanging open. Obito looked down at the ball of light she was still holding, and grinned to see it gradually brightening. Of course, it was powered differently depending on the chakra nature of the user. Minato-sensei’s wind chakra worked by him waving, her fire chakra
by holding the light in her warm hands

“I know the perfect fit for you!” Obito smiled.

*

Six years and a lifetime past, Yashino Uchiha had promised Obito the millipede summons if he never had students or children of his own who wanted it. That offer was now useless to Obito. You needed total mobility and agility to ride on the segmented back of a ten-foot-high anthropoid with Sixty-eight legs coated in poison.

But Yashino was surprisingly amiable to the idea of Anko trying to earn the millipede’s respect and was happy to meet her on a training field far from the Uchiha Compound. He recommended Obito bring along his old friend Kamo too, just to give his age mate a change of scenery.

“The trick with Song and all her family is to realise, despite detachable legs, hard shells, pincers and leaking poison they are all just cuddly babies.” Yashino told Anko seriously.


“I may have made a terrible mistake.” Obito muttered to her grandfather as they watched from a safe distance.

“You always say that Tessai, and things almost always turn out alright.” Kamo told her comfortably.

Obito smiled and didn’t correct him as to who she was. These days Kamo spent most of his time in the company of his brothers and sisters, all still alive and waiting impatiently for the 2nd war to start in earnest so they could leave their crowded home to fight. Kamo was happier as the spoilt child of twelve, than as the elderly sole survivor of his siblings.

Yashino dramatically pointed to a bag of manure. ‘Pig shit! Song’s favourite treat. They’ll eat normal soil usually, but manure is their demand for service and I’ve always given them the best!” He leaned forward theatrically. “It makes their poison even stronger.”

“Cool!” Anko had her hands held together with excitement.

“Definitely a mistake.” Obito said as Yashino summoned a finger long millipede (capable of giving a grown man seizures with a single bite) to warn the head millipede she would be summoned soon. Hopefully Anko’s new access to poisonous monsters couldn’t be traced back to her.

*

The day of Obito’s exam arrived. As did her escort of three, appointed by Fugaku to make sure she got to the Academy building on time.

“I’ve got two hours until I have to be there,” Obito argued in the face of Itachi, Inabi and Mai.

“Good, you can revise when we get there.” Mai told her briskly, talking her bag of seal notes and passing it to Inabi. “Get your coat, it’s cold out.”

“I’ll get to the Academy myself.” Obito sniffed, even as she looked for her winter coat, a hand me down quilted item, probably about as old as Konoha. Obito had cut herself while removing of the old matted fur on the collar and sleeves, replacing them with bold embroidered seals for warmth and
“I can remember you being late to class once a week at least.” Mai looked over the room. “Surprised Sakuya isn’t escorting you herself like when we were young. She told me she’d been over here a lot to help you study.”

“Did she?” Obito said neutrally. It had been months since her fall out with Sakuya, so long she almost forgot they were locked in a standoff, each holding the other’s secret affair hostage to keep their silence. Obito hadn’t told Sakuya of her break up out of spite and lack of time. They hadn’t seen each other outside of clan activities for weeks.

“But that’s not why we’re here.” Inabi said seriously, nudging Mai out of the way, “The Kumo diplomats finally arrived yesterday. No one is to go out alone until they’ve left the village.”

“They’re here for peace talks. For a treaty that’s as good as signed. Why is everyone so worried about them?” Obito demanded, straightening her formal shirt under her thick coat.

Mai grabbed Inabi’s hair and pulled him out away from Obito. “Kumo are strange.” She said brightly, as Inabi squirmed out of her grip. “They don’t think the way we do about things. Half of them choose not to wear family symbols, most of them don’t use second names and make up their own first names.”

All four Uchiha shuddered at that thought. Even Konoha orphans had clan symbols on their clothes when they turned six. Even if you had to make them up yourself you had to have something that showed who you were, where you came from. Even when Obito went out without an uchiwa on her back, she still always had one on her person somewhere, for people to see if they really looked. She wouldn’t be herself without a symbol, only the pitiful or the powerful went around with one name.

Obito got her boots, bid her grandfather and his dayminder goodbye and let Itachi lead her out. Mai and Inabi followed behind, continuing their shoving match as if they were still bickering children.

“That’s a nice scarf.” Inabi said, nodding to the colourful patchwork of fabrics Obito had sewn into a shawl, serving as a thick scarf in the winter morning.

“Thanks.” Obito said patting the blue patch that had once been part of Minato’s favourite shirt. “It’s for luck.” She had given in last night, when she couldn’t sleep for nerves and finally finished sewing together the leftover scraps from Team 7’s quilt. It wasn’t like she would ever see the quilt itself again.

There was a cold wind blowing through the streets as the four walked towards the compound exit. Half-hearted encouragement was called out from slightly open doors and windows as they passed.

“Good-luck!”

“You can probably do this!”

“Just do your best, it’s all we ask of you!”

“85% that’s all you need to pass. Don’t panic if you get stuck, just move on!”

Obito knew her family meant well, she did. But the advice they called out made her nervous. She had the sixty seals mastered, plus her own three new ones. Her only real concern was the verbal part of the test. If she got an examiner with the wrong attitude towards her she could be failed due to personality problems.
“So… How’s your team?” she asked Itachi, desperate to take her mind off her worries. “Are you getting on with them?”

“Well.” Itachi frowned seriously. “My taijutsu works well with Shinko’s style and Tenma’s ninjutsu makes up for my lack of Sharingan. Yuuki-sensei thinks my stamina is lacking and always cuts my training time when it’s raining or very cold.”

“That sounds like he just doesn’t want you to be out in bad weather for too long.” Obito told him gently. “He must be a kind teacher.”

“A ninja must endure all hardship without complaint.” Itachi recited. Obito flinched at the memory of another young genius quoting the shinobi rules in a monotone voice.

“Yes, I suppose.” She swallowed and recovered. “But I meant; do you find it easy to talk to your teammates, do you like them as friends?”

Itachi’s brow wrinkled as he seriously considered her question. “Shinko made the other girls stop following me, calling them cradle snatchers and perverts. She treats me like a little annoying kid most of the time. Tenma is always angry about something, no matter what I do. I don’t think he likes me. Yuuki-sensei always talking about his former Genin team, like he’s disappointed in us.” Itachi came closer to Obito as they walked and lowered his voice. “I thought older kids would make more sense, not less.”

Obito put an arm around his shoulder. “Honey, some people never make sense, no matter how old they get. We’re all different, we all act differently. But I can tell you from experience.” She took a breath and braced herself at the memories. “It’s tough being on the team of a genius. It’s difficult and so annoying to have a kid younger than you master things you struggle to learn. Could that be why Tenma gets angry sometimes? And why Shinko treats you like a little kid, to make themselves feel better when you surpass them?”

Itachi looked at her, opened his mouth to argue, then stopped and frowned. Understanding and surprise bloomed on his face. “Oh.”

“Oh.” Obito agreed. “I’m not saying they have any right to treat you badly, or be mad at you for being faster to learn things. But I will say it’s hard not to be mean when your failures are getting rubbed in your face by a little brat.” She patted his shoulder to soften being called a brat. “Your teacher is probably sending you home early so he can give your teammates extra training without embarrassing them in front of you.”

Itachi blinked at her. “You are so clever Obito. How do you know so much?”

A rush of surprised pleasure ran through her body and Obito felt a blush on her cheeks. She couldn’t remember when anyone had ever called her clever. Had anyone in her family ever said it? She was speechless.

In silence she and Itachi waited outside the Academy building while Mai and Inabi activated their Sharingan and checked for anything suspicious. Apart from a class running around the perimeter of the school grounds it was quiet enough, for a school day. As Inabi managed to nudge Mai out of the way to open the door for Obito, a few heads peered out the high windows above them.

“Hey look! It’s Itachi! Itachi is outside.”

“Do you think he’s coming back to class?”

“He’s got his headband on!”
“I knew he wouldn’t make it as a Genin.”

Obito frowned at the blank look of panic Itachi gave as the whispers from the school windows got louder. It had to be his old class that had spotted them.

“Give me a hug for luck?” she said quietly, and when he nodded his permission she put her arms around him while he held himself stiffly. Softly she said “When I go in, you smile up at them for a count of four, wave your hand gently for a count of six, and when they ask you about being a Genin, you say you have to go weed an old lady’s garden for a mission today. Then run off before they can ask you more. Can you do that?”

Itachi nodded curtly, as if she had given him orders.

Obito let go of him and walked into the school, Inabi impatiently closing the door behind and following her to the academy office. Mai gave her thumbs up from the outside while Itachi looked up at his old classmates and carried out Obito’s instructions, acting like a normal kid for once.

Then Obito was ushered into a test room and it was too late to panic.

*

Obito had sweated so much writing the test that her shirt was sticking to her uncomfortably. It had been the easy questions that stressed her out. She was used to having to reread questions to understand what they were asking, before straining her brain trying to come up with a decent answer. Easy questions scared Obito, convinced they were trying to trick her in some way.

Her paper was taken by an academy Chunin quickly and she was left to stare around the empty classroom, alone with her memories. School had been a pleasant place for Obito, despite being at the bottom of the class ranking for her, or rather his, entire school career. School meant spending time with Rin, hearing her reluctant laughter at his antics and having her gentle help with classwork. School meant long lunch breaks on the school grounds away from the realities of the war, making up games to go with their latest set of lessons and dreaming about the future. The realities of war never seemed to apply to them, though there was never any attempt to hide the truth from them. Obito attended mass funerals for his clan every month and helped his grandparents tend to those injured Uchiha the hospital could not fit in their overcrowded wards. Somehow, he never felt that any of the terrible consequences of battle could possibility befall him or his friends.

When futilely trying to stop Itachi’s early promotion, Obito had come across the statistics for her graduating year. Sixty genin, ages ranging from eight to fourteen, plus thirty graduates from the adult classes, made up of refugees and former dropouts enticed by shinobi war wages and a sense of duty. Of those nineteen, thirty-seven had survived the war. Of those thirty-seven, sixteen were still in active service when she had looked them up. Obito had no talent for mathematics, but even she could work out that sixty-four losses out of ninty was not a successful result.

Obito shook her head, ridding herself of her bitter thoughts. She needed to focus, her oral test was still to come. Whoever she faced needed to know Obito was competent at seals and a trustworthy person who deserved a seal licence. She was good with people, she was good with seals, it should be easy enough.

*

Only Mai was left outside the Academy when Obito finally found the strength to walk out of the building. Mai was seated on a bench near the playground, watching a first year class getting introduced to wooden kunai throwing, a strange pensive look on her pretty face.
“Well?” she asked as Obito slumped down in the bench next to her. When Obito just sat there, not responding, she put her arm around her shoulder worriedly. “It’s fine if you didn’t get it, no one was really expecting you to-“

“There were four of them.” Obito interrupted her tiredly. “Not one Tester for the oral part, four. A water monk, a member of the Diplomatic Corps and the oldest ANBU I’d ever seen-“

“-like you’ve seen many ANBU-“

“-and Lady Utatane,“

“Koharu Utatane? The Sandaime’s teammate? The student of the Shodai, the White Flower of the Mountains, the Lynchpin of the Fire Daimyo’s treaty? That Utatane?“

“I think so? I’ve never heard those titles ever.”

Mai’s grip on Obito’s shoulder tightened. “What was she doing at your exam?“

“I have no idea, but it made me really nervous. They seemed angry when I got the answers right, I almost didn’t pass-“

“You passed!” Mai pulled her into a hug, jumping off the bench to throw both arms around her. “You passed! Like really passed?” She pulled back to cup Obito’s face, “They actually said you passed?“

Obito pulled away to take out a scroll container from her pocket. Mai snatched it and took out the certificate. The gold of the stamps of office glinted in the noon light with four sets of signatures under them.

“Wow.” Mai said softly, then carefully put the paper back in its case. She gave it back to Obito and looked at her with a weird expression. “You passed.”

“I did.”

“YOU passed.”

“I said so.”

“You PASSED.”

“I thought I was the slow one here.”

“Apparently you’re not anymore.” Mai turned around and cupped her hands around her mouth. “Hey Ashino, Kumai, Odagiri! Obito got her seal licence!”

The three Uchiha children in the class throwing wooden shuriken cheered back at her and turned to tell all their friends. Their teacher futilely tried to regain their attention.

“I thought it was supposed to be a secret.” Obito said as Mai tugged her towards home.

“That was if you failed. We didn’t want the shame to spread.”

“…so there’s no celebration party planned for me?”

“I can fix that! I wanna see Grandma’s face when she finds out.” Mai laughed evilly. “Maybe she’ll finally be speechless.”
“Before we go home, can we go somewhere first?” Obito asked timidly.

“What farmer or shopkeeper or random old person do you need to talk to now?”

“I need to go somewhere, somewhere I haven’t been since I came back to Konoha.”

Mai dropped her hand and turned to look at her. “You really have to?” at Obito’s nod she groaned. “Fine. Whatever.”

* 

For all of Mai’s attitude she talked Kaoru into coming with them when the Chuunin met them on the way towards the mountain trail. The two of them ended up carrying Obito to the very top of the monument, when Obito would have settled with just getting level with the Yondaime’s face.

It was a good view. Really laid out how much Konoha had changed since she had last come up here, five years ago. Apart from the extra head on the mountain, the whole layout of Konoha had changed, buildings knocked down and rebuilt differently, more stone used than the wood before. No Hashirama to jutsu new buildings into existence, Obito supposed. Maybe in a few years’ time that little Motoku user would be able to recreate the wonders the 1st had created. Obito spared a moment to wish Tenzo luck, wherever he was and hope he found life better away from Danzo’s poisonous control. Poor kid, she hoped the Senju were being nice to their new heir, despite his odd origins.

She pushed away her thoughts of the last few months and focused on the feel of the purple felt at her chin, a piece from Rin’s spare mission skirt that dominated the edges of her scarf. Obito had spent a lot of their missions together rubbing his fingers on the edge of her skirt, trying to ignore the discomfort of Rin cleaning and healing his wounds. It was typical of Obito, that she only felt ready to talk to her best friend when she finally had something good to share with her, something to justify all her mistakes and stupidity. She wished Rin was here even if she would have a lot to lecture Obito about, before congratulating her on the seal exam.

Uchiha didn’t bury their dead, they burnt and scatter their ashes. Obito wouldn’t go to that sad stone and pile of dirt to talk to Rin, she would talk to her in the light, with all of Konoha around her.

“Hi Rin,” Obito finally said, “If you can hear me. I’m not sure if I like the idea of you watching over me or not. I mean, I probably need the guidance but I’m kinda a mess and no one needs to know how much I mess up all the time” The wind picked up and blew wet leaves at her face. “Okay fine, I’ll get to the point. So bossy.”

Obito brushed away the damp leaf on her cheek and raised her head to the wide-open view. And softly told Rin everything.

* 

Osuma was on gate duty again. He really needed to stop gambling with his clan duties. When he saw Obito and Mai coming he visibly braced himself and opened his arms reluctantly, “There, there. Who even cares what those pretentious asses think—” Obito flung herself into his embrace, making him stagger back a pace. “—you’re still the best tailor in Konoha! Why are you laughing?”

His duty partner stared at the official scroll case Mai waved. “No way, she passed?”

“Of course she did!” Osuma cheered swinging Obito around, “She’s the Always Surprising Obito! The Uchiha who defies the odds!” He gently set Obito back on the ground. “And speaking of odds—”

“I’m not taking your mission to the land of Snow! It’s no place for an Uchiha, it’s too wet and cold.”
Came the argument, as Obito and Mai walked pass them through the gates. He absentmindedly patted Obito on the head. “Good job kid.”

“Then you shouldn’t have made the bet with me!”

The sound of the gate guards arguing followed Obito as she entered the Compound, now alive with a completely different atmosphere as her family saw her smile and the scroll case. It was like when she had first returned from the dead, everyone smiled and congratulated her. Mai ran off promising her a celebration party that evening at Mai’s small home. Her certificate was admired, an old glass frame found for it, ready to be hung up by the time Obito reached her home. She was dizzy from relief and happiness as she opened the door. Finally, she had done something right.

She dropped her bag and shoes by the front door and made straight for the fridge, suddenly starving.

“There’s food on the table.” Came Mikoto’s voice and Obito knocked her head on her fridge door. She rushed back to the living room to see Mikoto dusting the curtains, neatly covered in an old scarf and robe, duster and dustpan in her hands.

“What are you doing here?” Obito demanded. The clan head’s wife did not help with other’s household cleaning. The clan head’s wife didn’t even do her own household cleaning. And besides Mikoto and Obito had been avoiding each other since Mikoto took offence to Obito trying to stop Itachi’s promotion and Obito had retaliated by sending three sugar crazed children to her neat house to show her what children should act like. Obito had been the one who had to clean their mess, and a cold standoff had run on since then.

“I wanted a word with Kamo while he was lucid,” Mikoto said casually, finishing the end of one curtain edge. “So I sent Anzu home for a long lunch break. When Kamo fell asleep I decided to help with a spot of tidying.”

Obito gave her a suspicious look. She had never known Mikoto to give Kamo a moment’s thought since he stopped work. She sent out her chakra senses to check where her grandfather was and found him settled in his study. She also belatedly confirmed it was Mikoto, though she had no idea who would want to impersonate her.

“I’ll just go say hello-” Obito said, backing away.

“Why don’t you do that later.” Mikoto said smiling. “Wash your hands and sit down. I want to talk to you.”

There was not a hint of threat or pressure in Mikoto’s manner or voice. And yet Obito was trapped, unable to disobey the clan head’s wife, even in her own home.

Obito washed her hands and sat down, letting Mikoto pour her a lovely cup of tea and warm fish. It was delicious and Obito usually hated plain fish on it’s own.

“So. You passed.” Mikoto said holding the framed licence, looking at the signatures. “They couldn’t find an excuse to fail you then?”

Obito blinked in surprise. “How did you- never mind.” She didn’t want to know how Mikoto knew what had gone on in her supposedly private exam. “They tried. I panicked when I saw just ink and calligraphy brushes set out to use. Spilt ink everywhere at my first attempt to show my own seals.”

Obito rubbed her weaker elbow, remembering how much struggle it was to keep the calligraphy brush steady. “The old ANBU lady, she kept trying to confuse me with theory questions. The Akimichi from the diplomatic corps made me tie back my hair and fold my collar down, convinced I
was going to use my Sharingan to cheat somehow. He glared at me the whole way through and was
the first to try and fail me when I spilt ink.”

“That Akimichi’s a diplomat of great renown and greed.” Mikoto told her casually. “He’s also
known for being easily bought in exchange for favour. And I know most of the seal masters in
ANBU are bitter old relics, refugees from Uzushiogakure that could never let go of the past and hate
all Konoha-born seal masters. Tell me how you still managed to pass.”

Obito tapped at the seals embroidered on her shirt cuffs. “I could wipe the ink off my clothing easily
because of my sewn-on seals. When they didn’t believe I had done them myself I got angry and
asked for a sewing needle. Lady Utatane had a cross-stitch hoop half done in her purse, she lent the
needle to me and I sewed on the scrolls. I got the ink off, pulled out the thread and reused the paper
again and again to demonstrate my seals.”

“Which seals?”

“The defection one, that I used to keep dirt off my clothing. It works on water too. And the storage
seal, to store items without scrolls. Last the privacy seals, which keeps thin barriers airtight, but still
lets outside noise and smell in.” Obito forced her face to stay blank as she thought of the last time she
had needed such seals. How shinobi in tightly packed apartment buildings had sex without them,
she’d never know.

“Yes.” Mikoto took a judgmental sip of her drink. “I suppose since you gave them a way to make
cheaper mission packs and better tents, they couldn’t fail you.” Her eyes narrowed as she put down
the cup. “Why didn’t you just give them the chakra storing seals as well and be done with it.”

“What?”

“Do you honestly think no one noticed Hatake’s sudden lack of chakra exhaustion? I try not to think
what he could have offered you for such a gift.”

“Nothing!” Obito took a big gulp of tea and hoped the hot water would be blamed for her red face.

Mikoto sniffed. “Learn to lie with a straight face. Now, what duties did they assign to you.”

“They couldn’t decide. The Akimichi wanted me crawling along the main wall, repairing the old
wards, the old ANBU lady said I should be put in a basement somewhere sewing defection seals on
every item of gear the ANBU use. The Water Monk, who was the only nice one, he thought I should
have a nice cushiony job in the academy teaching and researching. Lady Utatane cut the discussion
short, said they had to go to the peace treaty signing and told me to come to the tower in two weeks
for an official duty and the rest of my paperwork.”

Mikoto looked contemplative. “Utatane didn’t voice an option on your duties?”

“No,” Obito squirmed, already bored with the questioning. “She was blank faced and silent the
whole way through the exam. Like a judgmental statue, even when she gave me the certificate.”

“She gave you the paperwork?” Mikoto demanded.

“Yes. She filled it out and passed it around while everyone was arguing.”

There was almost a smile on Mikoto’s lips, “And she was the one who had an embroidery kit
handy.”

“Cross-stitch hop Auntie, it’s completely different—”
Mikoto waved a hand. “Whatever. She wanted you to pass, though she didn’t make it obvious. I thought Koharu-sensei was done meddling in village politics, but apparently not.”

“So…” Obito rocked in her chair uncertainty, “Is that a good thing or a bad?”

“Not sure. I’ll have to look into it. In the meantime you are to-“

“Stay out of trouble?” Obito was already standing ready to go check on Kamo.

“If you can.” Mikoto sounded amused. Still coolly disapproving of Obito, but amused. Obito took it as a sign their feud was over.

* 

In exchange for being the one to tell Ranma of Obito’s success (“She clenched her teeth so hard I thought they would shatter!”) Mai talked Daiki, the clan herbalist, into letting his eldest son stay over with Kamo while Obito went to her celebration party the next night. It was just the usual crowd of her agemates in Mai and Shisui’s tiny house, but it was fun. There was booze and cake and congratulations and kisses and cheers. It was the best night in the compound Obito had had in months.

The only sore point had been Sakuya claiming she had a work shift to get out of coming and Obito getting drunk enough to think sitting in Inabi’s lap and cuddling was a good idea.

So of course, the next morning there was an emergency clan meeting at dawn to attend. Obito sat in the back with Mai, Shisui and Kofun, and did her best not to look hungover and moments from being sick. The topic didn’t help.

“Let me get this straight,” Obito muttered to Shisui, who had gotten tipsy at the start of the party but was fully recovered and annoyingly smug about it. “The Kumo peace diplomat tried to kidnap his host’s three-year-old daughter. And Lord Hiashi rightfully killed him dead. But we’re worried Kumo will be insulted and threaten war? We were only officially at peace for twelve hours!” She covered her aching forehead with both hands and willed the nausea to fade. Poor little Hinata.

“Diplomatic immunity.” said Shisui with a shrug.

Kofun scoffed from the other side of him. “We’re forbidden to copy any Gentle Fist taijutsu, on pain of imprisonment. But Kumo can waltz in and try to steal an entire child without expecting punishment? What did he expect to happen? The Hyuuga would catch him and he’d just hand over the child and be lead out of the village?”

A row ahead of them Naomi leaned forward to ask an aunt of hers, still dressed in her police uniform, “Was the treaty signed?”

The aunt looked back and replied in a whisper, as the front row of Uchiha argued loudly amongst themselves “Yes, that’s the problem, it promised freedom of movement for forces to pull out of enemy treaty. Kumo could argue that that it included their diplomat and Konoha violated the treaty first.”

“But he was kidnapping a three-year-old child! Isn’t that a bigger act of war than killing said kidnapping scumbag?” Obito was not going to let that part go. Poor Hinata, she had already been so quiet and timid.

“Yeah, what would have happened if we had hosted him and he took one of our kids?” Called Daiki, “Would we be in trouble for killing him?”
“I’d love to see any weakass diplomate try to kidnap our clan heir. Itachi would have slaughtered him where he stood.” Osuma nodded proudly to the front where Itachi sat by his father’s side, staring straight ahead as people shouted around him. He seemed oblivious to the noise.

“What if he came for Sasuke? Or any of our other kids.” Naomi looked back to where the younger children were gathered in a makeshift creche, Kamo and other non-essential adults occupying them. Naomi’s daughter Fuji was playing a hand seal game with Obito’s youngest cousin Iroaka. Sasuke was sitting with a bunch of other little Uchiha, listening to Kamo telling them stories. Obito’s anger grew at the sight of their innocent faces.

“Then we would have done exactly what the Hyuuga did. Killed him dead before he got off our land.” She assured Naomi. The young mother nodded back at her, just as resolved. If Kumo had come for their children, there wouldn’t have been a corpse left intact enough to send back to the Raikage.

“It’s wasn’t Hyuuga territory, he was just outside their lands when he got caught. That’s another problem.” Osuma interjected. “Sarutobi’s set to have peace and the Raikage’s ballsy enough to carry out his threats.” He leaned over Obito’s knees to whisper at Kofun, “Watri’s convinced they’ll try to send one of us in tribute, since the Hyuuga are all sealed.”

“They’re not going to do that!” snapped Kofun, with an anxious look at his little sister Chika.

“You don’t know that!” Osuma was uncharacteristically nervous, looking around constantly. “This whole situation is a mess. I heard Suna’s threatening war on Iwa because of some attempt on the Puppet Master Chiyo’s life.”

Obito focused on not throwing up. Well fuck. She had hoped that whole situation had died down. Did she tell anyone she had framed Iwa for Danzo’s attempt on Suna’s power structure? Was there anyway she could be blamed for Suna going to war? Only Kakashi knew the exact details, she didn’t know how much Turtle had heard Obito lie to Chiyo.

“If we make a war alliance with Suna can we beat Koma and Iwa?” she wondered aloud.

“If they form an alliance then Kumo would be dragged down by Iwa’s instability.” Naomi speculated softly. “If they stay apart we should as well and just focus on Kumo.”

“WE ARE NOT GOING TO WAR WITH KUMO!” bellowed Fugaku from the front, standing up with a red face. Next to him his wife and son still looked incredibly bored. “There is no reason to panic. A has no intention on following through with his threats. Why would he order the kidnap of a Hyuuga child if he didn’t need more blood limits among his ranks? Kumo had grown weak and soft with their focus on technology over training, and now they are grasping at strings to save itself!”

Quiet mutters and looks around the room hinted not everyone agreed with their leader, but no one argued with Fugaku’s version of events.

“… so the Hyuuga will explain themselves and the Raikage will just back down? It that what will happen?” whispered Obito, putting the matter of potentially have started a war between Suna and Iwa behind her for now.

“Well obviously it won’t be that simple,” Osuma said patronisingly. “They’ll have to save face somehow.”

Obito bit her lip. “I don’t think Kumo believes in saving face, not like we do.” The few Kumo-nin she had seen in battle were odd. And those in prison had cheerfully taken every opportunity to
change allegiances and become Iwa-nin. Like they had no sense of dignity at all.

Chika shuffled over from her brother’s side and leaned down to put her head on Obito’s lap. She had grown up so much since her mother’s death, it was a surprise to see her acting so young. “I don’t like this talk. Kumo is in the wrong and we shouldn’t act like they aren’t.”

Obito patted her hair as she spoke “If only we could know what the Hyuuga are planning. We’d be able to prepare accordingly.”

“Yes,” Obito agreed softly. “Mariko told me they hadn’t know anything about any of the attempts to kidnap me. Who knows what information we’re missing about their attack…”

“I think we should at least offer our support, no matter what they decide to do. We are all allies against bloodline hunters.” Naomi offered reluctantly.

“Hopefully they’re fixing the holes in their security that let a single man get so far with a child.” Osuma muttered darkly.

“I wonder if my appointment with Mariko will still happen.” Obito whispered to Chika. “I wanted to tell her myself I got the licence. But maybe she’ll be busy with politics and stuff. Her husband is Hiashi’s twin brother, they’ll probably be busy helping with Hinata—”

Kofun and Osuma stopped talking to turn and stare at her, while Chika took her head off Obito’s lap to join in the staring.

Obito blinked in confusion. “What?”

“Your physical therapist is Lord Hiashi’s sister!” Kofun exclaimed loudly.

Slowly, row by row, the rest of the clan stopped their individual conversations turn back and stare in silence at an increasingly embarrassed Obito. She squirmed, “Only technically… she’s his sister by marriage but it works differently for the Hyuuga… like two separate families… why are you all looking at me like that?”

*

Hikari’s Byakugan eyes were wide and activated, as were the two guards behind her, when they opened the door of their home to Obito. A safe distance away Obito’s own family guards attempted to look non-threatening to the suspicious Hyuuga. Considering one had two hawks perched on his shoulder and the other had a huge battle-axe slung over her shoulder they failed miserably.

“I’m here for my appointment with Mariko?” Obito asked cautiously, showing her empty hands and formal dress without any obvious weapons. She hadn’t even brought a bag with her, not wanting to startle them. No new details had been forthcoming about Kumo’s reactions to the death and the Hyuuga hadn’t been seen out of their home in a week. “Please? My back is really bad and I have to report for seal duties in five days…”

Hikari’s face softened sympathetically, but the unfamiliar door guards seemed unmoved.

“I’m happy to disarm myself, even cover my Sharingan if you want…” She felt safe in offering that much. Her guards would wait for her outside and had come prepared to raise hell if she sent a sign to them.

None of the Hyuuga’s white eyes looked away from Obito, but after a moment they all reacted to some unseen signal and nodded in unison, deactivating their blood limit.
“Give your weapons to your family, you may keep two if you carry them openly.” One of the unnamed guards said.

Obito bowed and obeyed. She took off her shoes, noted the usual pair she wore while visiting was gone and followed Hikari in her darned socks.

They encountered more Hyuuga than Obito had ever seen before in the building, sitting listlessly in corridors or peering out of doorways. The few children she saw were in small groups bunched together, adults only a step away from them. For a family able to keep an eye on each other through walls it was a bad sign.

Hizashi opened the door to Mariko’s office as Hikari approached and waved off the guards, letting Obito follow Hikari past him into the room.

“What is at the main house with Neji. The family is having trouble sleeping.” Hizashi looked exhausted himself, as had most of the Hyuuga adults Obito had seen today. “I’m afraid your appointments will be cancelled until further notice, Lady Uchiha.”

“Obito,” she corrected him automatically, “I expected that might happen, don’t worry. The real reason I’m here is because,” she pulled a formal scroll from her sleeve pocket and bowed as low as she was able. “My family is outraged at Kuno’s disrespect.” Obito recited stoically, “We consider your brother’s actions justified and congratulate him on saving his child.”

Hizashi looked taken back at her words and took the offered scroll hesitantly. “This is from you and your grandfather?”

“My entire family, Lord Fugaku included. We stand ready to support your clan in whatever actions you choose to take.” Obito straightened up and brushed her dress smooth again. It had taken hours for a committee to write that letter, though only Fugaku’s signature was upon it. Obito hadn’t been told what was on it, as she had been busy getting lectured and told what to say and do. She also had to get dressed up in a formal but non-threatening outfit. Obito hadn’t known hair pins weren’t supposed to double as senbon until her aunt had brought out some flimsy civilian ones.

Hizashi stared at the scroll, then lifted his head to look at Hikari then Obito. “The Uchiha would support the Hyuuga?”

“Against kidnappers? Yes, of course.” Obito said firmly. “What’s more important than our families’ safety?”

It was impossible to truly know when a Hyuuga was staring at a single point, but Obito did feel like both Hizashi and Hikari were hyper focused on her now.

“You gave your eye away, to an outsider. Some would argue that you are the reason for the escalation in bloodline hunters.” Hikari finally said, looking down at their loosely bound kimono.

“That’s a lie!” Obito declared, going off her carefully rehearsed script. “My great-grandfather had a dozen children and lost more of them to eye hunters than battle. There has always been threats to our dojutsu, isn’t that the excuse your clan head uses to seal you all?” She gestured to their covered foreheads

Hizashi leaned back fractionally, as Hikari’s eyes widened.

“I was always taught to keep my eyes safe. And that’s what I did when I gave up my Sharingan. I made sure my eye and my teammates got safety away from the enemy.” Obito said shortly. “My family have dealt with my actions and the situation is resolved. What we have to deal with now is
lying guests who come into our homes under the guise of goodwill and try to kidnap our babies!” She swallowed and put her hand down, going back to standing formally. “I mean… my clan would not accept such an insult and we don’t expect the Hyuuga to either. We stand ready to lend our support to any decision you make.”

“Any decision Lord Hiashi makes.” Hizashi corrected her.

“What?”

“For all our similarities, there is a world of difference between Uchiha and Hyuuga. I assume from your words that more than Lord Fugaku and the Uchiha council of elders had a hand in sending you with this letter.”

“We don’t really have a council of elders, everyone who wants to have a say in clan matters, just had a say. It’s not very formal.”

“That sounds chaotic.” Hikari said wistfully.

“It is.” Obito agreed cheerfully. “We were on the brink of declaring war on Kumo by ourselves before we calmed down a bit.” It had been very therapeutic, everyone expressing their anger and fear without any real intention of carrying out their more colourful threats. Everyone had felt united and purposeful in their rage, before cooling down into more sensible talk.

Hizashi tilted his head in surprise. “You really are an Uchiha.”

“Excuse me?” Obito blinked at that odd statement.

“I had my doubts, you acted so gentle before…”

“There’s a time and place for gentleness.” Obito said shortly, discomforted by his words. She was acting like she always did.

Hizashi looked at Hikari and nodded to the door. “My wife did leave some notes on new exercises for Lady Obito. You had better get back to your post while I search for them.”

Hikari bowed fractionally to Hizashi, smiled uncertainty at Obito and left the office. Hizashi gestured for Obito to take a seat before stepping over to Mariko’s desk and searching among her papers.

“You don’t have any children, do you Lady Obito.” He said casually as he moved the framed photo of himself and his son.

Obito signed. “No, no children, in spite of my aunt’s nagging.”

Hizashi nodded, “But I understand you are close to some of your clan’s children, such as the clan heir. I hear he’s considered a genius.”

“Itachi? I suppose we’re close, it’s hard to tell with him. He’s very self-contained, likes to be independent.” Obito hadn’t seen Itachi since the clan meeting. She hoped he was doing better with his teammates.

“Like Neji,” Hizashi suggested softly.

“…yes,” Obito agreed hesitantly, “I’ve seen similarities between them, though Itachi is much more serious. He’s a Genin now, you know.”

“I know.” Hizashi paused in his searching, “I heard a rumour that you opposed his graduation from
the academy.”

“I voiced my doubts. It’s allowed. The clan listened then politely ignored me. It’s turned out fine for Itachi… so far.”

“You still have doubts?”

“…” Obito ran her fingers along the embroidery of her dress belt. “I looked into the village’s records regarding early graduates and child soldiers. It almost never turns out alright for them. The few children that do survive to reach adulthood are almost never,” Obito searched for the right word, “…normal? They never manage to live productive lives outside of their duties. And they don’t last as many years as you’d expect in shinobi service either.” She thought of Itachi, needed her to talk him through dealing with his teammates and old classmates. She remembered Kakashi, always two steps behind his age mates with regards to jokes and friendly banter, “I’m just not convinced the benefits of having geniuses become shinobi so early really outweigh the damage it causes them in the long run. Sometimes I—” but she stopped there, unable to voice the forbidden opinion.

But Hizashi’s voice was soft and understanding. “…sometimes you wish they could have had more time, to just be children?”

Obito looked away. “I know the children themselves would disagree with me. Itachi was happy to become a Genin at eight. He knows his duty.”

I knew my duty. Echoed Kakashi’s voice steadfast and certain.

“That’s because they are children.” Hizashi said softly. “They don’t know any better.” He stood up, having found a folder on Mariko’s desk. “This is it. Mariko prepared two months worth of exercises and instructions, since she was unsure of when she would next see you.”

Obito took the file, and let herself be escorted out, feeling very bewildered. She felt like she and Hizashi had been having two very different conversations. What did Neji have to do with the Uchiha’s offer of support?

“So?” Akina Uchiha reached for her axe hilt as Obito exited the Hyuuga house, “We going to war or what?”

“They didn’t give me a formal response,” Obito told her. “I think we need to wait at least an hour or two before we march on Kumo.”

“Fine.” Akina rolled her eyes and kicked her meditating son gently, making his hawk summons ruffle their feathers irritably. “Let’s get going, Hazuki wants you at her place two hours before your dinner date.”

“What dinner date?”

“The one with Yashiro you keep weaselling your way out of.”

“I had seals to study!” Obito argued, accepting the handful of weapons Akina had been keeping for her.

“Yeah yeah, congrats and all, glad you finally have your career in order. But now you gotta sort out your home life.”

“I don’t believe this.” Obito muttered and reluctantly trailed her escort back to the compound. “Why can’t you all just let me be?”
“It’s cause we looooove you.” Kenta told her cheerfully, as he let his hawks fly free above them. “Also, we’re kinda hoping you put some kind of anti-grope seal on Yashiro, before he gets himself castrated.”

“Kenta!” his mother scolded him. “That’s your uncle you’re insulting.”

“And you’re his brother’s widow, but that didn’t stop him feeling you up last month.”

“I told you, I knocked him into the fireplace accidently. Nothing else happened.”

“This conversation is not making me feel any better about my date.” Obito told the arguing two.

Akina patted her hand comfortingly. “Just focus on the free restaurant food. Hazuki told Yashiro to make a booking at Teyaki’s place.”

“So that half the clan can watch this disaster of a date over a plate of good food?” Obito sighed. “Fine, let’s get this over with.”

“That’s the spirit!” Kenta cheered.

*

Hazuki insisted on helping Obito dress for her dinner date with Yashiro. And by helping, Hazuki meant inflicting a different set of jewellery and shoes on Obito, in addition to straightening her hair with the dreaded fire tongs. Obito chose the path of least resistance and talked to Izumi while her mother treated her like dress up doll.

Obito’s makeup took more time than even Hazuki expected and she arrived late to the Uchiha restaurant. Yashiro, still clad in his work uniform, just laughed it off. “Stopped to help an old lady gather sticks, did you?”

Obito, who had promised half a dozen people she would take this date seriously, really give it her best shot, forced a smile. It seemed to startle Yashiro who took in how she looked and got awkward himself. “So... come here often?”

“This is the Uchiha compound. We both live here.” Obito told him, failing to keep the dryness out of her voice. They entered the restaurant in silence and let Teyaki guide them to their reserved seats at a non-traditional table which was high enough for Obito not to kneel and put stress on her legs.

As the Uchiha compound only sit down restaurant it was quite busy, filled with Uchiha off work and unwilling to even heat up leftovers, and couples escaping their crowded homes for some relative privacy. What Uruchi lacked in shinobi nerves she more than made up for with culinary mastery. The conversation between Obito and Yashiro was hard work, once they had covered the topics of who was watching Yashiro’s kids, what Kumo was up to, that Obito had really passed her seal test and how irritating civilians were at the station.

Obito watched Yashiro finish his first glass of beer and call for another. She must have failed to keep her discomfort out of her face because Yashiro scowled at her. “It’s just another drink, I know my limits.” Obito nodded and didn’t pull away when he put his hand on hers. “You can drink too if you want. I’m paying.”

“I can’t while I’m on my meds.” Obito said softly.

“You still taking stuff? I thought you were fixed at you can get. I mean, not like you can grow back your leg right?” Yashiro laughed and let go of her wrist.
Obito smiled weakly.

“I mean, it’s been three years since you got back. Everything else,” Yashiro waved a hand at Obito, “Works fine now, yeah?”

“I have chronic shoulder pain and nightmares more nights than not, if that’s what you mean.” Obito told him stiffly.

“Uhh no, I meant,” Yashiro waved at her again and lowered his voice, “The other stuff. You’re okay... down there?”

“Are you asking me if I was raped or if my vagina still works?” Obito asked in exasperation, hot indignation washing away her restraint.

“Whoa!” Yashiro put up both his hands. “Back up, I didn’t mean it that way.”

“What did you mean then?” A hint of anger entered Obito’s voice.

“Hey! What’s your problem? I was just trying to make conversation!”

“My problem?” Obito made an attempt to control her temper. Looked down at the nice table and took a deep breath, then looked up at Yashiro’s smug smile and gave up. There was no real way she would have ever seriously considered marrying Yashiro. Might as well express her real feelings. “My problem, apart from you asking if I was sexually assaulted, right in the middle of a restaurant filled with our family,” said family all pretended hard they weren’t listening intently, “is that at Naomi’s wedding dinner you groped me. My grandfather was sitting right across from us and you reached under the table and put your hand on my crotch!”

“Oh?” Yashiro leaned back, “I was drunk, doesn’t count.”

“Yes it does! It was awful and I should have said something then.”

“It was just a friendly squeeze, you looked so nice I wanted to compliment you. You’re taking it the wrong-“

“Really?” Obito leaned back, raising her voice to carry to other tables around her. “Anyone who enjoys being groped by drunks: tap your glasses.”

The conversations around them faded a bit but no one tapped their glasses.

“No one is paying attention to you,” Yashiro smirked triumphantly.

“Anyone who thinks getting groped by a drunk is gross and wrong tap your glasses.” Obito continued undaunted. Her face was flushed with anger and embarrassment but she wasn’t letting the topic drop.

Loud tapping echoed across the room, as glasses were hit with fingers, chopsticks and kunai. Obito’s shoulders dropped fractionally. She was in the right.

Made buoyant by the response she continued while Yashiro looked around in search of allies. “Who wishes Yashiro would stop getting drunk at family events and groping the nearest warm body?”

Loud tapping, as the tables further away started to listen in.

“Oh come on!” Objected Yashiro. “I’m not the only one. It’s a harmless bit of fun.”
“Who agrees with Yashiro?”

Dead silence. There was one, maybe two taps from somewhere in the room, but they quickly stopped.

Obito smiled sweetly into the silence of the room. “Who thinks Yashiro should be cut off from drinking until he learns to control his impulses?”

Among the loud tapping echoing across the restaurant, someone hit their glass so hard it cracked.

Yashiro stared at Obito in horror as a waiter appeared with their first courses, put down their plates, Obito’s tea and Yashiro’s second beer. Without missing a beat the teenager picked up the beer and put it back on the tray, walking back to the cooking area.

“Wait!” Yashiro called, but it was too late. Obito smiled to herself. Then she noticed what was on her plate.

She grabbed a different waiter as they passed and pointed at her meal. “This isn’t what I ordered.”

“Granny Ranma thinks you’re getting fat and you need more brain food.” The girl said calmly. “Granny Ranma also said to tell you the date is over and when you finish the fish you are to have the rest of the meal at her table in the back.”

“What,” Obito frowned down at her fish. Ranma had been content to let her be for a while now. She couldn’t think of anything she had done wrong recently that required a long conversation.

“Ha!” Yashiro gloated. “Serves you right!”

Obito glanced behind her, decided she wouldn’t make it to the exit before someone stopped her and focused on getting as much anger as she could out of her system before meeting Ranma. “I hope the next girl you paw stab you in the balls,” she hissed, stabbing her fish.

“I hope Ranma has a long serious talk with you about your future. And how you threw it all away by being a bitch to me.”

“I hope you develop an alcohol allergy and throw up every time you take a sip of beer.”

“I hope-

Their waiter re-appeared, “Grandmother Ranma says she hopes you two hurry up and finish before she has to come over there herself.”

Yashiro and Obito shut up and ate the rest of their meals in bitter silence, while around them their family laughed quietly. Obito’s affection for her clan evaporated. Traitors all of them.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The Uchiha are their usual mix of kind and cruel, Ranma wants babies and Obito wants a job that doesn't suck. Shisui almost causes an international incident and ANBU continue to be overbearing control freaks. Then something happens that makes Obito throw all her caution and sense to the wind.

Chapter Notes

The story actually takes a step in the right direction plotwise? Who knew.
Thanks to the wonderful Yulialeafhill who worked overtime in the betaing and messed up their sleeping cycles to make sure I kept all my OCs straight.
Let me know what you think about the new story summary.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ranma Uchiha, keeper of the Uchiha genealogy scrolls, bane of Obito’s life in recent years gestured impatiently for Obito to sit at her small dining table in the back of the Uchiha Compound restaurant.

“Well,” She demanded as Obito closed the shogi door behind her, phases of the moon covering the dark rice paper that made up the private room. “How did the Hyuuga respond? What was the impression you got from the Branch House?”

“It wasn’t the Branch House, Granny Ranma. The Hyuuga all live in one big house, not two,” Obito responded as she slowly lowered herself into the low chair, glad to see she wasn’t expected to kneel on a pillow.

“I watched that compound get built, child. The Main House building has all the trimmings and the Branch House is squeezed into the back, as far from their masters as they could get,” Ranma told her as Uruichi, the chef herself, appeared with two steaming dishes.

Obito remembered the long thin corridor she had never walked down, where Mariko told her the Main House members quarters were. And large open space on either side of that corridor, one side full of kitchen gardens and training areas, the other ornamental but useless flowering plants and decorative statues. “Yes, Grandmother Ranma.” She agreed, suddenly wondering about the range of the torture seals, and if the Branch Hyuuga were at least safe in their own bedrooms. “I spoke with Hizashi.” Obito said as a plate of tonkatsu was put before her by Uruichi, who smiled warmly at her.

“And, did he give any response, any hint as to how they will react?” The serving of food Ranma got was smaller, but she also had a side bowl of miso. Uruichi bowed low to Ranma and left the room, leaving them alone once more.

“No. He told me it would be entirely up to his brother and the elder’s council…which is crazy. How will he know what decision to make without hearing the opinion of those who actually mix with the
rest of Konoha?” Obito frowned.

Ranma didn’t answer and gestured for her to eat.

Obito obediently ate her meat in silence, refraining from asking for a drink. Ranma disapproved of the new fashion of having a drink with dinner, just as she disapproved of more talking than necessary during a meal. Sometimes Obito felt like Ranma disapproved of everything that wasn’t her beloved clan records or grandson Shisui.

Ranma sighed and put down her chopsticks. “What are we going to do with you Obito?” she said in an oddly fond tone.

Obito swallowed her mouthful, not really tasting any of it. That was a question loaded with meaning. “Love me for who I am?” she said hesitantly.

Ranma smiled without humour at that, “This from a girl who very publicly humiliated her latest suitor. No one will court you now.”

“So?” Obito put down her chopsticks too. “Would that be so bad? I have my licence now, I can support myself and Grandfather Kamo. I’m turning eighteen next month. I’ll be an adult legally.”

“A Fūinjutsu licence isn’t the same thing as a shinobi headband. You still have to obey the civilian laws and regulations. That means you only become a legal adult at twenty, not eighteen.”

Obito fisted her hands in her lap. “Who came up with that? It’s so unfair! Why are there different rules for civilians, they’re just as mature as shinobi eighteen-year-olds, probably more stable too!”

Ranma inspected her neatly kept nails, then turned her hands to show her heavily scarred and calloused fingertips. “An old compromise with the craft guilds when the village was built.” She said, not looking up. “All to do with apprenticeships and taxes. A civilian girl can’t even get married without her family’s permission until she’s twenty, unless she’s pregnant and the father had enough clout to have the honourable thing done.” She resumed eating her meal.

“Maybe that’s why the civilian orphanages are so full.” Obito muttered, taking up her chopsticks again.

“That and the coin mothers get for delivering in the hospital. Don’t be fooled, most of those orphans were birthed by desperate women who come to Konoha just for a safe delivery and leave with only a handful of coins.” Ranma took a bite of her meat. “It keeps the Academy classes full I suppose.”

“Is this going to turn into another rant about why all Uchiha should give birth at home naturally and be up the next day and back at work?” Obito asked picking at her food. “You know the medical procedures are totally safe. They only cut open the mother when she’s having trouble delivering naturally. Kaiya from my veteran meetings told me about her breech birth…”

“I didn’t call you here to hear about some new-fangled birth process. Unless you’re expecting?” Ranma looked down at Obito’s belly, hidden by the table, “Are you? It doesn’t matter who the father is, we’ll get it all sorted out!” She leaned forward excitedly.

“I’m not pregnant, I’ve just been studying too hard to train much.” Obito said putting a defensive hand over her waistline. “Stomach exercises are hard with my injuries, you know that!”

“Fine.” Ranma said with resignation, relaxing back. “I was just hopeful. It would have been something joyful to focus on in these difficult times.” Obito stuffed food into her mouth to prevent herself from muttering angrily. “If you were pregnant we might have been able to arrange widow
“Make what easier? Is this about my council votes again?” Obito scowled, more at the thought that Kakashi had probably changed his will and revoked her inheritance of his two votes when she came of age. His faith in her ability to make good decisions was probably irrevocably damaged by the whole Suna and Danzo debacle.

“No Obito, you must know...” Ranma’s voice was soft and gentle in a way Obito seldom heard from the old woman. “Kamo’s not going to be with us much longer. Certainly not two more years.”

Obito stared down at her plate and carefully breathed.

In and out. In and out. In and out.

Until finally she had enough breath to speak through lump in her throat. “Yes,” she managed then went back to breathing.

In and out. In and out.

It hurt to hear the fact spoken out loud, the dark thought that she had pushed down into her the corners of her mind. “He’s fading fast.” Along with Kamo’s loss of memories came the manic episodes mixed with lethargic hours of staring at nothing. The rest of Kamo’s body was following the lead of his mind and shutting down.

“For all your faults,” Ranma reached out to touch her hand hesitantly. “You made his last years very happy, I don’t think he would have lasted this long if you hadn’t returned. He’s lived this long because of you.”

Obito nodded, unable to speak. There was a pounding pain behind her eyes. The guilt of having Kamo’s Sharingan as her new eye, the fear that that surgery had accelerated his decline, warred with the fear of losing another loved one.

“In light of your new duties, congratulations,” Ramna muttered the last word, “A shift list is being sorted out for who will watch him and the amount of housekeeping help you’ll get has been increased. No one minds much, Kamo and his line earned much gratitude for their services.” Ranma looked pensive briefly. “I know it’s a hard decision to face, but while he’s lucid we need to ask him about what things he wants to be burnt with him and what he wants to pass on to others.”

Obito managed a sound of affirmation, too caught up in her grief to speak. Her eyes felt like they would burst. Did they want to activate? She bit her lip and forced down her chakra.

“We have to be prepared when the end does come and plan what will happen then.” Ranma said calmly, taking back her hand. “The house is in your name of course as is the contents. The bulk of Kamo’s inherited wealth was spent on your medical bills, though I’m having trouble getting my hands on the last set of figures and owed amounts.”

That was because Obito’s records were under Tower security now, Obito realised as she tried to calm down and pay attention to Ranma’s words. The blinding pain abated. The Tower worker in charge of her case, Kyoko Yamato, had been talking of trying to pay off Obito’s medical bill in one go and avoid the increased interest, using complicated money jargon Obito didn’t completely understand. Maybe Obito should mention Kyoko and what was going on with her records?

“-about starving,” Ranma continued speaking as Obito refocused on her words. “Yashino and my sister-in-law want you to live with them, though I suppose your Aunt Izanami will demand you stay
“Why would I move?” Obito asked, forgetting her concerns about her records, “You just said I would get Grandfather’s house.”

“If you’re not a shinobi you can’t live alone until you’re twenty or married,” Ranma explained slowly.

“So kids of six can live alone if they’re in the Academy but heaven forbid a eighteen-year-old civilian lives in her own house? Who makes up these crazy rules?” Obito demanded.

“Alright, we could maybe get away with bending that law,” allowed Ranma, “But we are the police and have to be seen as obeying the laws of the village. And,” She coughed looking away, “We don’t have the space for you to live alone in a three-bedroom house, Obito. I’ve got three married couples with young children fighting each other over who gets to approach you first. Of course,” Ranma took on an innocent tone of voice that didn’t suit her at all. “If you were married and had a baby on the way… no one could object to you staying in your family house.”

Obito scowled down at her plate. “You just said no one will court me after how I treated Yashino.”

“We can pretend that outburst was due to grief.”

The anger she felt completely did away with the remaining pain in her eyes. Obito clenched her hands and shut her eyes taking a deep breath, trying to summon some calm. “Granny Ranma, I have told you. Repeatedly. I do not think I’m ready to get married or have children. There is no one in the clan I love in that way. I really have been trying but they’re not.”

“Romantic options, I know.” Ranma waved a hand at her. “If the clan was the size it was twenty year ago, I could provide you with a dozen potential matches you didn’t grow up with as playmates. That’s always an issue when the clan dwindles down to a mere three hundred.”

Obito picked at her plate, appetite completely lost. The coming months loomed over her threateningly. The last of her immediate family was drifting away from her, orphaning her once more. Izunami was loving and kind and the closest thing to a mother Obito could remember after her Grandmother. But she didn’t understand Obito like Kamo did. No one else in the clan really did.

Obito was slowly losing someone to talk to, someone happy to listen to her talk about nothing for hour and hours, just for the pleasure of talking. Even in the grips of his dementia Kamo was happy to talk and Obito was happy to talk back. Who would talk to her without interrupting or correcting her?

Her plate of cold food was removed from her sight. Ramna didn’t speak until a small plate of mochi was put down in front of her.

“When my brother died I thought I would never smile again.” Obito looked up at that, to see the old woman drinking a cup of sake and looking to the side at the painted moon phases. “I had our parents and my husband and a child on the way. But I always felt connected to Kagami, like we were two sides of the same blade. I was surprised he could die without me dying as well. Perhaps a part of me did die, the day they gave me the news.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Obito asked softly.

“Because I thought my heart would break, when I lost the one person who understood me completely. But a broken heart still beats and that loss made my familyline what it is today. I survived and you will too. Before anything else Obito, you’re a survivor.” Ranma smiled and for a moment the years lifted and Obito saw where Mai’s striking beauty came from, where Shisui got his
easy charm.

Then it was gone and Ranma’s calculating gaze was back as she looked away and drank her saki. “Now eat your sweets before I change my mind. I can’t believe how big your hips have gotten.”

Obito sighed. And ate her mochi.

* 

In the four days before reporting for her new sealing duties Obito sewed frantically, desperately, unendingly.

Unsure of what her new Fūinjutsu duties would be and how much of her time they would take she vowed to herself she would make a fresh start at demanding payment before she did mending and seal sewing for anyone else. This meant she had to quickly finish off all the free sewing projects she had already agreed to do.

The clothing she had borrowed and ruined in her trip to Suna were replaced or repaired. Anko’s curtains and additional armour because mesh didn’t offer enough protection against baby millipedes learning to control their poison glands. Anti-dirt seals on all the clothing an irritable Hazuki brought over, insulted on her brother Yashiro’s behalf at Obito’s behaviour on their date. Memory quilts for various deceased clan members, and if Obito cried over the fact she’d be making another one for herself soon enough, she managed to keep her tears off the fabric patches.

Finally all that was left was her great-aunt Tessei’s battle suit, the old fashioned weaved armour needing to be patched with new fabric and then hardened with wax and chakra. Obito sat in the kitchen and failed to work out the old fashioned weaving while Kamo slept or was lucid and capable of talking, getting up to play children’s games with him or to try calming him when he reverted to a young age.

The triplets had not been Kamo’s nearest aged siblings, but the two identical triplets were always closer to each other than the left out Tessai. So Tessai had been happy to let the much younger Kamo tag along with her, being her servant and pet as the mood stuck her. Mostly Kamo was happy to obey Obito’s gentle orders when he mistook her for his sister. Though he was often confused by the unfamiliar house and garden. It made Obito wish the Kyuubi attack had not destroyed so much Uchiha property, that she had more familiar items and places to show and soothe Kamo with. Then she felt ashamed, remembering how many Uchiha had also died in that attack, with their property.

“It was seen as a dishonour to die off the battlefield.” Kamo remarked randomly, looking up at the axes on the walls. “My father forced me to close his wounds enough that he could leave the medic tents and die at an enemy’s hands rather than from infection… Mother never forgave me for that.”

He reached up to touch a double sided axe, one far too heavy for him to lift. “I was surprised to realise she actually did love him. I always thought they married because they were the only two descendants of Baru left but I suppose you can’t have 16 children out of only duty.”

“There were only twelve of you grandfather-“ Obito corrected gently. “Aso, Tsurugi, Aino, Iwaki, Yari, Toko, Tessei-Kita-Take,” she recited the triplets in one go as he always did, “Gyosha, Ro and Kanaya,” she pointed at her grandfather, using his real name instead of the nickname he had gone by for decades: Kamo, because he followed his siblings like a little duckling.

“The stillborn and miscarried ones still count…you must remember them too when you go to the shrine room…” Kamo trailed off still staring at his mother’s weapons.
Obito tugged out the bulky wool, angry at how badly she was repairing the damaged battlesuit. “What shrine room?” she asked.

“I don’t know!” Kamo shouted suddenly and turned to stomp his feet at her, body language completely changed, “Medri keeps teasing me and Yari about some secret room she got to go to, but she won’t tell me what’s in it! You have your Sharingan Tessei!” He looked imploringly at Obito, “You have to tell me what’s in it. Please!” He reached out a hand to her, then stared at his large, aged hands, “What the? Did father put a genjutsu on us again?”

Obito was up and moving towards him before he could start trying to cancel the genjutsu. “It’s not genjutsu Kamo, it’s okay—“

“You’re not Tessei!” Kamo screamed, backing away from her until his back hit the wall. “Where’s Tessei? Kai!” he activated his one Sharingan preventing Obito from being able to cast a sleep jutsu on him. “Stay away from me!”

“You’re going to hurt yourself, please calm down. Everything is alright….” Obito cajoled, wanting to go nearer but scared the axes on the wall would start to cut into his skin soon. She would need to dull the blades or take them down.

“I want my family!” Kamo howled, a little boy trapped in an old body.

“I know, I know.” Obito said helplessly.

A thin senbon hit Kamo perfectly and Obito was just fast enough to catch him as he fell forward into unconsciousness. Kofun entered the kitchen with a frown, taking Kamo from Obito and up into his strong arms. “Where should I put him?”

Obito put a shaking hand to her heart, “The futon, he gets confused in his bedroom.” She sniffed. “You didn’t hurt him?”

“I don’t need a Sharingan to hit the nerve points to put someone to sleep.” Kofun easily carried Kamo through to the other room, Obito rushing to overtake him.

Kamo was gently tucked onto the now permanently set up futon in the centre of the main room. Very gently Obito removed the senbon in his neck and kissed his wrinkled cheek. Kofun accepted back his needle and followed Obito quietly back to the kitchen. “He’s getting worse. You need to get him sedatives.”

“I am not drugging him!” Obito told him harshly, packing up her sewing. “He sleeps so much already. That was just a little turn, it doesn’t happen often.”

“Whatever.” Kofun opened the fridge door and helped himself to the leftovers. “You good for your meeting today? Ready to finally get official duties?”

“Maybe I shouldn’t go.” Obito turned to look back towards Kamo’s sleeping body. “I should stay till he wakes up, make sure he’s okay.”

“No no.” Kofun, closed the fridge and gently poked Obito. “You have to go, we’ve boasted about your new licence too much to lose it now. Go get a job, make the clan proud, ra ra ra.”

“You just want the house to yourself.” Obito told him cynically, getting on her jacket and scarf. She had a new satchel by the door, dug up from someone’s old school days, was packed with both ink sealing equipment and her sewing tools.
“I share a tiny house with five other people, I need some quiet. When Kamo wakes up I’ll make breakfast with him, then try to take him out for some gardening. Your aunt is coming with lunch to take over, then Yashino is going to take him for a long walk.”

“That sounds nice.” Obito got her shoes on but stopped by the door, unwilling to leave. What if Kamo needed her.

“Just go!” Kofun opened the door and threw out her satchel. When Obito screamed and ran after it, the house door slammed shut behind her and locked. Shisui, holding her caught bag with one hand, grinned in confusion.

“This yours?”

*

Shisui was going the same way as Obito, the Tower for his own set of new duties. He carried Obito’s bag and boastfully guessed what his next mission could be, while Obito tried to cheer up and forget her worries about her grandfather.

“I’m thinking it’s to Kiri. There’s weird stuff going on up there. Rumours of freak tides washing up old ruins, making everybody more tense than usual. Not good for a place already known as the ‘Bloody Mist.’” Shisui laughed.

“So obviously you’re the perfect one to send,” Obito said glumly. “Since they’re so nice to children up there.

“With my super special moves? Yes I am!” Shisu linked arms with her and grinned. “Don’t be jealous, Miss Seal Practitioner. You can’t be the only special one.”

“Just don’t be too cocky,” Obito warned him, surprised his eyes were now the same height as hers. Stupid growth spurts. “Those genin exams they hold, they have crazy in the air over there.”

“That’s funny,” a voice came from the side, just by the Tower’s main entrance. “They told me the same thing about your lot before we came to Konoha!”

A large muscular body de-slouched from the wooden wall and moved towards them, blocking Obito and Shisui’s entrance to the Tower with causal arrogance. Obito didn’t need to see the headband on his head to know he was from Kumo. The imposing outsider wore the usual black outfit with an off-white flak jacket of Kumokuge, complete with shin and arm guards. No bag or obvious pockets, and a pointedly empty sword holster at his side. Unarmed and very relaxed about it, he made Obito’s heart speed up with nerves. A middle aged shinobi, so calm in the middle of an enemy village, had to be powerful in battle and politics.

Slowly, Shisui passed her bag back to her, though he didn’t unlink their arms or reach for his sword. Obito felt the closed clasps of her bag and shifted it to her free arm. Around them villagers continued about their business, though they gave the Kumo-nin and two Uchiha a wide berth and Obito could sense a few high level nin’s watching from out of sight. So this Kumo-nin must be part of the diplomatic party still being held in Konoha. Probably not allowed to kill him then.

“Crazy is making innocent children kill each other just to become Genin.” She told the smiling man calmly, forcing herself not to gather her chakra in readiness to fight.

Brilliant white teeth stood out sharply against the darkness of the rest of his appearance. Obito had been told the black soil and mountains of Kumo meant their black outfits and dark skin helped its people blend in with their environment. But here, in green and light Konoha it just made him stick.
out like a poisoned nail.

“Ah yes,” the Kumo-nin nodded and folded his arms in an overly relaxed fashion. “But those Kiri Genin tend to be much tougher than any other village. While Konoha Genin are coddled like babies and their retiring rate shows it.”

Obito smiled, even as the insult hit. She and Shisui exchanged a single glance, before she started replying. She forced her body loose and relaxed, refusing to let her fingers reach for the seals in her clothing. “I suppose the amount of our Genin that survive long enough to retire might look like weakness to some. But remember our medical care is the best on the continent. When you consider that we lose so few to infection and blood loss, that we can cure most poisons and inoculate against new diseases as they spring up… it must look odd to outsiders that most of our Genin have the option of retiring rather than die pointlessly from healable injuries,” she paused, tilted her head with a vapid smile.

Shisui’s chakra was calm and steady, his pulse slow where his arm linked with Obito’s. She felt no fear being so near to danger, having said something so insulting to a high-level enemy. All Obito really thought of was tiny Hinata struggling to keep up with her cousin’s katas. This man could have crushed the little Hyuuga with one hand. Obito dared this enemy to try kidnapping her. She’d get Shisui to pin him down while she clawed his eyes out-

“That’s an adorable amount of killing intent for a retired shinobi…"

Obito blinked at that, images of violence vanishing in her confusion at the random observation. She was as unfit as she had ever been, had the barest hint of make-up on her face, not near enough to hide the scars that dotted her left side and covered her right. Her outer jacket had no Uchiwa on it and she was carrying a school bag. What sign did he have that she was a retired fighter, not just an unfortunate civilian?

“-we were having such a civilised chat and you ruined it with your menacing attitude!” The Kumo-nin smiled smugly despite his accusations.

“We were having such a civilised treaty before your leader decided to kidnap a helpless little girl-“ Obito didn’t need Shisui’s elbow to her side to know she was overstepping herself. She shouldn’t be letting him get to her so much. She needed to shut up and back off before she created an international incident. Again.

The Kumo-nin tilted his head. “Did he really do that? I thought we’d have to wait for the higher ups to decide what happened in the Hyuuga Roost that night. First you judge Kiri and now Kumo. Strange that two youngsters think they know so much about topics outside of their concern.”

“Bloodlimit matters are all of Konoha’s concern,” Shisui finally spoke, in a light teasing manner. “Any idiot knows it’s the duty of a great village to keep an eye on matters of the outside world.”

And then Shisui was behind the Kumo-nin, arms behind his back, body language relaxed. Obito hadn’t seen Shisui move at all. One second, he had been standing arm in arm with her, the next he was five feet away without a sign of jutsu or movement. Not even the air or street dust was disturbed by his movement.

“And speaking of duties,” Shisui continued as the Kumo-nin spun around, reflexly grabbing for a sword he did not have. “My cousin and I have important work to report for. If you would excuse us?”

By the time the Kumo-nin had put down his hand, Shisui was back and arm in arm with Obito again,
as if he had never moved. If Obito hadn’t felt his body heat go and return against her skin she would have assumed he had used genjutsu to project himself behind the Kumo-nin, not actually moved physically. She had never seen anyone move so fast, not since Minato-sensei.

She tightened her grip and tugged him closer to her side as Shisui lead her to the tower door, going past the Kumo-nin without a sideways glance. Her fingers brushed the side of Shisui’s sword holster, protection seals tingling with her chakra. They were almost at the door to the Tower, safely out of earshot.

“You really are as fast as they say: Shisui of the Body Flicker. Anyone would think you were the student of the Yellow Flash, not the rock-crushed girl next to you-”

And Shisui was gone again, even as Obito turned her head at the threat in the Kumo-nin’s voice. By the time she had turned around fully, Shisui had his sword out and at the smirking Kumo-nin’s throat, his Sharingan spinning.

“Shisui!” Obito hissed as around them the relaxed chakra of hidden watchers tensed up to react. “Get back here!”

“Listen to your cousin, child.” The man said calmly, not even tensing at the blade resting on his throat. “You’re good but you’re not ready to face down the I of the Storm.” He looked down at Shisui’s swirling eyes without flinching, his own eyes shifting from brown to a flash of white light as he pushed away at the sword. With a bare finger on the very point of Shisui’s sword, he easily shoved it, and Shisui, back.

Shisui took a half-step, adjusting his footing to move into a fighting stance. Obito’s chakra string caught his upper arm before he could reposition his hand on his sword to a swiping grip. She yanked him back, forcing him to backup until he was right in front of her.

“Do not let him trick you into a fight.” Obito hissed, releasing the chakra string to fade to nothing. “What’s the matter with you?” she asked as she gripped the back of Shisui’s shirt.

“That’s what happens when you coddle your Genin.” I said with amusement. “The few that make it to jounin are overconfident in their abilities.” I waved a warning finger at the two Uchiha, even as ANBU started to appear around him, probably to caution him on his jutsu use.

“Asshole, both of us were on the warfront before we hit ten, don’t talk to me about coddling!” Obito shouted pushing the Tower door open and yanking Shisui through the doorway after her. She let the door slam shut before they could hear the Kumo-nin’s response. “Shisui, what the hell? You’re supposed to be the relaxed one in the family.”

Shisui pulled away, sheathed his sword and roughly finger combed his curls with both hands. He looked at her seriously and abruptly swept her up in a strong hug. “No one gets to threaten you, not even diplomats.”

“That’s sweet, Love,” Obito gently tried to get out of the uncomfortable squeeze. “But no one is going to attack me in the middle of a busy street right outside the Hokage Tower.”

“Yeah but,” Shisui squeezed her even tighter. “He knew who you were, just from the sight of your face. Those Kumo-nin are overconfident, even with the failed kidnap. Who knows who they’ll try to kidnap next.” He rested his forehead on hers, eyes serious. “Don’t leave the Tower until I send someone to get you. If I can’t get back here by nightfall I’ll send a message to the Station for someone else to walk you home.”
“This again? I don’t need an escort Shisui! I have a licence- shit!” She bumped her forehead against his firmly, forcing her way out of his arms. “I’m gonna be late!” She rushed further into the Tower’s central room, satchel clutched to her chest.

* 

“The sewers?” Obito asked with a distasteful curl of her mouth, looking down at her assignment papers. The office she was in was part of the rebuilt side of the Tower, cold brick walls instead of neat wooden ones. It was one of the many tiny sad spaces allocated for the less exciting departments of the village, put on the ground floor for non-combatants to get to easily.

The one assigning Obito her new duties was the same Akimichi that had been on her Seal license exam, cheerfully informing her that she was expected to deal with stinking pipes and sewage for the next 6 months.

“It is a very prestigious role.” Washoku Akimichi told her earnestly, “The Nidaime himself designed the sewage systems of Konoha, they are a marvel of efficiency and endurance.”

Obito nodded glumly. “If his work is so great why do you need me to crawl around checking the ward seals on them?”

Washkoku thumbed his light brown goatee, “Konoha’s population is now eight times the size it was when it was first built. Though the founders anticipated and planned for the village to expand, there are many little issues that need to be dealt with.”

“Like a lack of toilets? Can’t we go back to latrines and outhouses, isn’t that better for the soil?”

Washoku waved a saggy hand, “A modern village requires modern comforts. But you misunderstand. It’s not the bathroom installations you need to concern yourself with. It’s the underground pipes.”

“Underground?” Dark cave walls and bleak rock roofs appeared in the corners of Obito’s vision. She felt weight on her chest and cheek, a shot of agonising pain from the foot she no longer had. Obito gave a full body shake, reminding herself she was free from any rocks or prisons.

Her new boss didn’t seem to notice her distress. “Yes, with the dramatic increase of bathrooms and plumbing on Konoha, the main set of sewage pipes under our streets and buildings needs to be enlarged. That can be done by civilian workers but there are multiple seals on the pipes.” Washoku handed over a stack of old papers, a heavily labelled map of the pipes on the top page. “Ones that keep the pipes watertight and impregnatable, ones that sift through the sewage and divide what could be recycled and breaks down the rest. There are even seals which recycle some of the water for irrigation in the inner wall farmlands.” Washoku smiled admiringly at the paperwork, “We are privileged to continue the projects he created for Konoha.” he added with apparent sincerity. “Truly, Lord Tobirama was a genius…”

“Not genius enough to keep the police station’s lockup toilets from blocking every other month.” Obito muttered under her breath. But maybe that was why the sewage needed to be expanded.

Obito forced a bright smile onto her face. The man seemed less grouchy than he had been at her test, maybe if she just explained her issues he would re-assign her. “This whole project sounds delightful, but I’m very concerned with the underground part of these duties. Did you read my file?”

“Chuunin honourably discharged, frontline fighter with no particular specialities, forbidden any duty outside of the walls.” Washoku reeled off, patting a folder covered in cup rings and tea stains.
“Though if you play your skills right you could get onto the Barrier Squad and be allowed the honour of keeping our walls sealed to invaders.”

Obito, who had been the target of about a dozen attempted kidnappings in the past three years, managed not to roll her eyes at that remark and kept a smile on her face. “I lost my leg in a cave in just before the end of the Third War. Then was an illegal Prisoner of War in Iwa for about twenty months. I’m not one to linger over personal trauma but being underground is not my favourite place to be.” She focused on the wooden floors, the leaf patterned ceiling, the weight of her weapons in various pockets. She was in Konoha, she was safe.

The Akimichi looked briefly uncomfortable at the frank summary of her history, then tried to hide it by being overly serious. “The pipes aren’t deep underground, and we’ll have to get the work crews to dig them up and expose the top of the pipes before we do anything else. You won’t have to go down deeper than your stomach with most of the work and we can sort out someone to carry you down and up again.”

Obito looked over the map again and pointed to the edge of the paper, “Right, so these pipes here, that go right under the wall—”

Washoku shook his head. “Those pipes are deep underground but we’re not replacing them for years yet. They still work fine.”

“Okay then.” Obito turned over the first page, looking at the scheduled work plan for the next three months. Her still queasy stomach noted that while the original pipes had been wooden pipes, made by the Shodai’s mokuton and stronger than any natural type of wood; the replacement pipes they would be putting in now were clay ones.

“When will the replacement pipes get here.” Obito asked calmly, a horrible though occuring to her.

“We’ll make them here in Konoha, of course!” Washoku said cheerfully. “That’s how we’ll get your seals onto them, before they’re completely baked solid. I negotiated a very good deal on black clay from the Bird mountains. The preliminary results are very promising. We’ll be churning them out as soon as the rest of our ordered supplies arrives.”

Obito nodded, no longer really reading the paperwork. She was thinking about how Kumo was right across from the Cockerel Mountains, though admittedly with a shallow sea between them. How I, the Kumo-nin, had been so relaxed in the centre of Konoha, so sure the Hyuuga incident wouldn’t affect him. How much money a project like this would need and how rich Kumo was compared to Konoha these days…

None of this was Obito’s problem, nor would she be rewarded for trying voice her disjointed thoughts on the matter. She was just there to put in enough work hours to keep her Seal Licence. The unease in her stomach could just be because of the encounter with Shisui and the talk of her imprisonment. She looked up at the waiting Washoku and plastered on a calm grin.

“I suppose, clean water and sanitation is important for the whole village.” Obito said, trying to feel some excitement for her new duties. “This will make the lives of those living on the outskirts of Konoha, without proper bathrooms, so much better!”

“Sure,” Washoku said dismissively, “But turn to page five of the planning draft, and you’ll see the new facilities we’ll be able to build for the grand arena. We’ll be able to charge so much more money during the Chuunin exams!”

*
“These books don’t leave this room.” A soft spoken Chunin informed Obito as he slowly turned a handle that opened the heavily armoured door. The monstrosity of a bookcase behind it held what looked like hundreds of small notebooks and scrolls, neatly packed into shelves from floor to ceiling. “In fact, they don’t leave their place on the shelves unless you know for certain it’s a book you need.”

“Okay,” Obito looked away from the mountain of written work and around the rest of the cold room, from the study table dwarfed by the bookcase to the locked door of the only exit. Only the high windows of the room, showing the red rooftops and random trees of central Konoha, kept her from freaking out about the enclosed space she was now in.

“The study door doesn’t open until the bookcase is locked and the bookcase isn’t locked until every book is back in its proper place.” The Chunin, who had introduced himself as Abe Maruboshi, a weary-sounding man who acted much older than his early thirty looks, handed her a pair of gloves identical to the thin cotton ones he wore. “You will wear a new pair each time you come here, and you will never let your bare skin touch the pages.” He told Obito seriously, straightening the glasses dangling from his neck.

“Contact poison?” Obito asked as she put on the soft gloves.

“No, the oils in our skin is bad for the ink.” He said with deadly seriousness.

“Right.” Obito nodded and took a hesitant step towards the closest shelf. “So which ones are Tobirama’s notes?”

“Oh, you sweet innocent.” He said taking on a soft sympathetic look. “These are all the notes of Senju Tobirama not under A or S rank security,” He smiled proudly as Obito’s jaw dropped. “We have an index of what subjects are covered in which notebooks, but it’s kept back at the main helpdesk for security.”

“Right.” Obito closed her mouth with a snap. She had been studying seals for over two years and she had one notebook of her own work. There were about twenty pages of her writing in it and half of that was sewing patterns and to do lists… “So for the next two months, while I wait for sewer pipes to be made, I’m going to be working in an enclosed space with cooling ventilation-”

“The pages need to be kept cold to prevent cracking-“

“-and walking down two flights of stairs and two corridors to find out where anything is in this-” She searched for a word to describe the overabundance of writing gathered in the bookcase. “-collection.” She finished lamely.

“I’m excited about it too!” Abe said cheerfully, fiddling with his glasses again. “We almost never get an excuse to hang around when the Nidaime’s works are being examined. It’s usually Jounin and the like with the Hokage’s permission to be alone in the room.” He looked around the obviously empty room and lowered his voice. “I think sometimes they don’t use the gloves.” He hissed in a horrified tone.

“That’s… terrible.” Obito said, feeling out what response she was supposed to give. The seal books Jiraiya had given her, plus the random scrolls her family had started giving her at odd times, were currently piled up in her laundry hamper among her dirty clothes. Obito decided she would never mention that to anyone who worked in the archive and research department. They might cry.

“It is terrible.” Abe agreed solemnly. “So while you do your research, I will be checking the entire collection for damage and doing what I can to repair them.” He smiled brightly again. “We are going
“Sure, why not.” Obito said glumly. She was glad someone was happy about her assignment.

* *

It was lunch time. While Obito worked in the Tower doing research she would be allowed one meal a day from the Tower cafeteria, like all Tower workers and all Shinobi on standby for new missions. It was something Obito had been looking forward to, the food options and new people to talk to.

Except her lunch tokens hadn’t been prepared yet, she so was digging around in her new locker, getting the storage seal in her bag with dried fruit in it, to shut down her rising panic that she was going to starve.

She was just trying to remember how old the juicebox with the fruit was and if she could safely drink it, when a slight man in ANBU uniform and a Panda mask appeared next to her on the locker bench.

He caught Obito’s bag when she threw it, dodged her kunai and waited politely for her to stop panicking, examining the embroidery on the front of her satchel. “Show me your Fūinjustu work.”

He intoned when Obito paused, knife held threateningly in her hand.

“Why should I?” Obito demanded, readying herself to flee or fight. She didn’t recognise the mask but he could be one of Danzo’s Root agents.

“Because I want to evaluate it?” Panda tilted his head slightly, showing a bald patch and grey hair in his ears. “We need to test how effective your seals are before we use them in the field.” Obito hadn’t known ANBU could get that old and still be in the force. Even the ANBU woman at her seal exam had only been in her sixties. This ANBU had to be in his seventies if not older.

She narrowed her eyes, “I thought my duties were already arranged. No one said anything about ANBU.”

Panda shrugged skinny arms, “As I say, we need to test your work thoroughly, before we even consider putting them to use on missions.” His voice had an accent to it, an inflection on the vowels that Obito had heard in Uzu natives. Kushina’s accent had sounded like it when she really lost her cool and forgot herself. Obito wanted to trust this man. And yet-

She slumped against the wall of lockers. “I’m trying to think of a smart way to ask this subtly, but it’s been an emotionally draining day and I’m tired. So: how do I know you are a real ANBU and that this isn’t some overly complicated plot to get me or my family into massive amounts of trouble,” Obito activated her defensive seals on her shirt as she finished her question, and readied herself to scream if he took offence.

“Ah,” Panda paused at that and seemed to consider her question. After a minute he nodded slowly. “You have a point, I suppose. How inconvenient.” He looked down at his liver spotted legs and sandaled feet. “How would you suggest I prove myself true?”

Obito let out an irate sigh. “I don’t know, get someone I can trust to ask me? One of the ANBU I know who are legitimate maybe. The woman who was at my exam, I think I’d know her from an imposter. The medic Owl, the Hare with the bad short haircut, Badger who’s a captain and uhhh…” Her mind kept going to Dog, Dog who was now Rat, send him to me I miss him…

“That misnamed Mouse who is gigantic and ooooh!” She snapped her fingers. “Cat! Cat with the purple hair and sword and attitude! She’s of Uzu blood too I think? I’d know her anywhere!” Obito backtracked. “I mean.. I don’t know-her know-her, but I know her with the mask on? Does that make sense?”
Panda stood still and silent for a long time. Finally he spoke a bit uncertainty. “You did pass the seal exam, didn’t you. This isn’t an elaborate trick Porpoise is playing on me?”

“If she is I hope it means I get a different project to work on.” Obito told him morosely. “This all seems arranged especially to drive me mad.”

Panda scoffed abruptly, “Don’t be silly child. You’re not that important.” His words lingered as he vanished. Obito stuffed her bag back into her locker, slammed it shut and walked quickly to the cafeteria. Food tokens or not, she was going to sit somewhere surrounded by people.

* *

“Obito?”

“No,” Obito said, her face pressed down onto the table top. “She’s not in. Her spirit has fled this bureaucratic hell to a happier place. A place without sign-in sheets and lunch tokens. A place with alcohol and free food.”

“I don’t have alcohol, but I will split my lunch with you.”

Obito lifted her head to look at Kyoko. Who was smiling brightly and holding a crowded lunch tray and a new looking book under one arm. “Is that-?”

“It is!” Kyoko sat down at the cafeteria table and passed Obito a glass of juice and salad. “Five hundred copies printed in Reed Country, delivered three days ago. This is the last copy left.”

“I didn’t think the editing circle was that big.” Obito said as she stabbed at the salad eagerly. “Who needs that many copies?”

“Obito,” Kyoko leaned forward, sliding the book over to her. “I sold them.”

“What for? For what?” Obito looked down at the book, professionally bound and covered, looking for all the world like a real work of fiction. “Who bought them?” Obito had gotten old Itsuo’s grandson to draw a better design for the cover art, in exchange for some of her grandfather’s expensive plants, which needed more attention than they were getting now.

Kyoko ticked of the answers on her fingers, “For money, a reasonable amount and the bookstore up in the North quarters…Jou has a cousin who works there. And they sold out!”

“What!” Obito exclaimed, causing the other tower workers in the cafeteria turn around to frown at her. “Why?” She looked down at her salad.

“Because people liked it and they told their friends,” Kyoko said excitedly, starting on a dish of stew. “And they bought copies too. I’m ordering two thousand more copies to be printed.”

“Are you insane?” Obito lowered her voice, “There aren’t enough people in Konoha who like silly rewritten books to get that many! How much is that gonna cost?”

“I’m not going to sell them just in Konoha.” Kyoko told her jubilantly. “And leave the money side of it to me. Speaking of which.” She reached into her shirt pocket and pulled out a bunch of notes. “That’s your share of the proceeds, I took some of it back to pay for the second printing. It’s not a lot but I did get enough for you to buy the better type of painkillers. And I got Owl to write a prescription for them too.”

“Is it wrong that I’m more excited about the painkillers than the books?” Obito asked, stuffing the
money and doctor's note into her jacket pocket. It was more money than Obito had seen in ages.

“Yes, but I forgive you since you started the whole project. Now,” Kyoko passed her a bowl of rice
and spooned some stew on top of it. “Tell me about your new duties.”

* 

“Fūinjustu work.” Cat demanded, materialising two steps up from Obito as she slowly made her way
down the spiralling staircase of the Tower.

“Nice to see you again too, Cat. I’m fine thanks. How are you.” Obito muttered, clutching the stair
railing. She had thought the shallower stairs would be easier to walk down. She had been wrong.

“Pissed off that I got dragged from the break room dorms just because you’re being uncooperative.”
Said Yuugao sulkily. Her purple hair was still messy from sleep and her bra straps were showing
around the ANBU vest. There were wrinkles in her black underpinnings.

Obito bit back her sympathy, she had good reasons for not trusting a strange ANBU. “Excuse me for
not wanting to end up in the Hokage’s office getting blinded.” Obito told her, stepping down another
stair.

“Why would you think you’d get blinded?” Yuugao asked curiously as Obito gave up her pride and
starting clutching the stair railing with both arms, taking her weight off her back and bad leg.

“You know what happened last time I took ANBU presence for proof I was doing something legal.
Lord Hokage was clear on what happens to me the next time I mess up.” She said sliding one hand
then the other down the rail, gingerly moving her bad knee.

Yuugao was silent for a minute. Obito made it to the landing of the staircase and stopped to rest. “I
need a lighter bag.” She gasped, adjusting the satchel hanging around her neck. “Or better yet, I’m
putting everything into storage seals. Why didn’t I think of that before?”

Yuugao walked around Obito and stopped in front of her, blocking her way. “You walked back
from Suna, why are you making such a big deal over a few stairs?” she demanded.

Obito glared at her. “It’s because I walked back from Suna that I can’t manage. My back is all
fucked up from the trip, my usual doctor is hiding in the Hyuuga compound with the rest of her
family and the stress of this Black Ops guessing game is not helping either!”

Yuugao raised her arms, then lowered them, clearly at a loss. “Do you want some help?”

“NO,” Obito turned away, leaning over the railing to look at the ground below the staircase. “I do
not want help! I want to be able to go down a few stairs without agonising pain, be able to do what
my superiors ask of me without worrying it’s all a plot against me and to have a job I get some small
amount of enjoyment from! I also want my grandfather not to be dying, my family to stop pressing
me to get married and oh yes, Kumo to stop being a threat Konoha.” She ranted, the day’s pressures
spilling out of her.

Yuugao didn’t say anything after that, just quietly got out of the way as Obito very slowly limped
down the stairs and politely didn’t say anything about the tears on her face. When Obito finally made
it to the bottom Yuugao was waiting with a chair for Obito to fall into.

“I’m sorry,” Yuugao said as Obito massaged her leg. “I didn’t think about how things look from
your side of things. The ANBU who spoke to you is our top Fūinjutsu Master and it is safe to do as
he says. We want the defection seal you designed and the privacy seal. We’ll test them during the
upcoming ANBU exams and let you know if we’ll want you to start putting them on our gear.”

Obito sighed and shut her eyes. ANBU exams meant her family bitching about not being selected for them. If they had the slightest idea she had any connection to it they’d hound her to get some of them into the exams.

“How many seals do you want and on what should I sew them?” she asked reluctantly opening her eyes to look at the short sword user.

“At least ten of each on various under-layers.” Yuugao said, “I have some old ones for you to sew on, when will you have time to do them?”

Obito looked over towards the main doors of the Tower. It was past noon and she would have to wait at least three hours before someone came to walk her home. “If you can find a quiet corner for me to work on this floor I can do it now.”

Yuugao demonstrated true ANBU arrogance and kicked out a couple of genin playing cards in one small room, sending them back to the mission room to wait with their overindulgent sensei. Then she insisted on commandeering a cushioned chair and a lamp from another room and setting Obito up comfortably. Finally Yuugao stood guard by the open window and let Obito relax with her sewing.

There were thirty black material underlayers, all bits and pieces from the ANBU’s iconic uniform. Made with bamboo fabric over steel lining, Obito used her thinnest needle to sew through the material with her most expensive silk thread, one of single figments, not short ones twinned together. It was calming and reassuring, to finally have a task to do that she had confidence in achieving.

Obito sealed all thirty sets of various black sleeves, leggings and vests, ten with both seals and the rest with one or the other. When she finished she looked up blinking out of her meditative focus. “Is there a way to tell which ANBU I can trust? For next time.”

Yuugao relaxed out of her guarding stance to look at her. “No, you have to wait and see. Eventually their true allegiances show. But most of the time it doesn’t matter much. We supposedly all have the same goals…”

Obito snorted and folded the black items neatly. “Sure you do. I’ve finished these. Anything else?

Yuugao came forward and took the under layers pausing with her hand over Obito’s. “The Captain’s not the same, after everything that happened. I thought he’d be happier… without the distractions. And his work is good and his manner is... focused. But he’s not great. I think-“

“I think you had it right the first time we met. He’ll be fine with a bit of space.” Obito interrupted, pushing away her hand. “Everything is easier this way, better for everyone.” She looked up into Yuugao’s painted eyeholes. “There’s no reason for you to speak to him about me or anything that happened today.”

“But-“ Yuugao started to say before a ruckus from outside drew their attention. Yuugao pocketed the black under layers into her belt pouch as she ran for the window and opened it, Obito joining her as fast as she could.

Out in the street two squads of ANBU conferred, one set travel-worn, the other fresh and alert. All of them seemed panicked.

Yuugao reached out and banged on the window sill, drawing the attention of one of the squad members. She used ANBU handtalk and the ANBU below replied in kind. Obito craned around Yuugao’s head and caught the tail end of their silent conversation.
“Shit!” Yuugao spat and pulled back, closing and locking the window. She spun around and walked for the door. “Your family is sending someone to walk you home, is that right?”

“Sometime before dinner, yeah.” Obito turned back to her open satchel, putting away her tools. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing you can do anything about.” Yuugao said distractedly. “Just stay safe. I have to go.”

She dashed out the door.

Obito finished packing her kit, and edged cautiously back to the window. She peered through the glass at the ANBU agitatedly talking to each other. After a quick chakra scan to make sure she was alone she activated her Sharingan, increasing her ability to catch the fast hand talk they were using among themselves.

ANBU code was secret, no one knew it but the ANBU themselves and the Hokage. But it had been changed abruptly, since Orochimaru’s defection. ANBU had had to learn it fast. Obito had taught Kakashi how to use his Sharingan better, memorizing without outright copying the new code. She had picked up a bit of it, accidentally. It happened with the perfect memory recall of a Sharingan.

FOX MISSING.
KUMO LEFT.
FOX LUNCH MISSED.
KUMO HAVE FOX QUESTION
QUESTION
QUESTION
WAR one hand started to sign before it was caught and squeezed in warning.

Obito blinked her Sharingan off and thought. There were no fox masks in ANBU anymore, not since the Kyuubi attack. No clans affiliated with them either, none except-

Her breath caught. There was one person in Konoha who could be given a code name like Fox, who would cause such a panic among ANBU for being missing. Who would be a prime target for Kumo...

Naruto was missing. Kumo had left the village and Naruto had not been seen since and there would be war if he wasn’t found fast.

Obito deactivated her eyes, grabbed her bag and was out of the room and then out of the Tower before she had a chance to truly to consider her actions.

Chapter End Notes

The scene we all want with the two people is happening next chapter! Everybody stay calm while I panic about writing it!
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Naruto doesn't even bother to learn Obito's name. But that's okay, she has far more things to be concerned about, like reconciling with her cousin, if not her life choices and dealing with Jiraiya's return. Plus a sane, well-meaning person finally interferes with Obito and Kakashi's crumbling relationship.

Chapter Notes

This chapter isn't nearly as exciting as anyone had guessed it would be, but I stand by this plot point. Better stuff coming up soon.

(show of hands: who is happy to be pandered to with fanservice in the next chapter, though it has little bearing on the plot?)

Since in canon both Yuugao and Tenzo have Cat masks, and I’ve made a point to change Kakashi’s to a Rat when he became captain (seriously, a white-haired dog masked ANBU who flings around lighting, who could it be…) I gave Tenzo a dog mask in this fic, I thought it would be a nice bonding moment for him and Kakashi. Tenzo is the only character in Naruto I have never wanted to slap or head desk at, only wrap in blankets and feed soup too…

Sakuya and Sumiya are based on the title character Rizzoli and Isles (except openly together and gay, not just hinted at…) and I need you to know they lead a life full of dramatic police work and mystery murders. This has no bearing on the fic at all, but it makes me happy to picture it.

Thanks to YuliaLeafhill who betaed this so quickly.

Obito was halfway between the central part of Konoha and the East Quarters where Naruto’s orphanage was before she got a grip on herself and ducked into a side ally to re-evaluate her decisions.

Naruto was missing and Kumo might have taken him. What exactly could Obito do in this situation, apart from rushing around Konoha confusing matters further. She wasn’t allowed outside of Konoha’s walls, wasn’t much of a tracker, and in no shape to do anything useful. Her family would panic if she disappeared again and the rest of Konoha wouldn’t deal with it any better.

Obito leaned against the brick building and pressed her hands to her head. What was she doing? Why was everything going wrong today? Was Naruto really kidnapped by Kumo or was it something else entirely.

She dropped her hands and looked up above the dark alley she was into the early evening stars just starting to come out. The best thing she could do was go back to the Tower and see what other news
she could overhear. Maybe go all the way up to the mission room, on her aching legs, and listen in on the gossip that always roamed those busy offices.

Really though, all Obito wanted was to go home and let this terrible day end. From her disappointing fuuinjutsu assignment to the mind-numbing research she would have to do and tedious bureaucracy, it had not been a good return to village service. She was tired and in pain and just wanted to go home to her bed.

Obito pushed herself off the wall and reluctantly walked out of the ally and back towards the Tower. She took the backways and side streets, wanting to avoid any of her family on police patrol and the ANBU that were probably on high alert. She didn’t want a lecture on how irresponsible she was being, wandering around alone when Kumo had allegedly kidnapped a random orphan.

The last sunlight of the day was fading away as Obito turned onto the restaurant part of central Konoha, full of stalls and small houses converted into restaurants at street level. She supposed that all these places would be grateful for new bathrooms and more running water, since some of them still had buckets of water outside their entrances for customers to use. She should think of that when she started her work, not the fact that the Akimichi district, with its numerous fancy cookhouses were scheduled to be the first to receive new plumbing works. Maybe she could press for the single restaurant of the Uchiha compound be next in line?

Many of the eateries had small electronic signs advertising their meals, something Obito had never seen before. It was alarming how much Konoha was changing and at such speed since the war. A cold wind blew down the streets, making the few remaining paper lanterns signs wave gently. Those bright beacons of flame and bamboo, wrapped in silk or rice paper, used to dot every door in Konoha before electricity came to the Land of Fire. It felt a bit threatening, seeing electricity take over from honest flames. Obito stopped and stared at one large lantern for a long time before actually registering the name painted on it.

Ichiraku.

The last time she had been anywhere near Kushina’s favourite ramen stall Kakashi had taken her hand and very gently led her away. Obito hadn’t realised it then, but that had probably been the start of their relationship changing from former teammates linked by grief to something else.

Obito shuddered as another gust of wind swept through the streets, going right through her jacket. Reluctantly she stepped towards Ichiraku, wanting to get out of the cold while she activated the warming seals in her jacket sleeves. She stopped, just outside the fabric noren that divided the restaurant entrance from the street. She could just see bottom legs of the five stools, no feet resting by any of them. Obito couldn’t go into the empty stall. The ghostly echoes of Minato-sensei whimpering at his empty wallet, Rin tugging at his sleeve trying to get Obito to swap her egg for bamboo, Kushina laughing and slurping loudly. Obito could hear the unending sound of noodles being wolfed down, stopping with a loud satisfied sigh.

“Ah!"

Wait. Obito actually heard that. With her ears, not her memory. Was she going mad? The restaurant had looked empty.

Stealing all her courage, Obito pushed open the white noren and looked through the gap. The corner seat of the stall was occupied, by someone too short for his legs to be seen from the outside. That someone had bright blond hair like his father but was slurping down ramen noodles with the same speed and gusto as his mother.
“Well come to Ichiraku! What can I get- you!”

Old man Teuchi, who really was an old man now with grey hair and weather worn skin, turned back to his work space after a look at Obito’s face. She wasn’t sure whether she was going to scream, cry or breakdown in hysterical laughter, and it must have shown on her face as she stepped into the room properly.

“Can-.” a small voice said. “Can I have more?” Naruto sat with his knees on the seat, just high enough to reach the eating counter comfortably. He hadn’t turned to look at Obito.

“Do you want the same again?” Teuchi turned back to the serving counter and held another small bowl full of noodles and broth. “You haven’t tried my pork ramen. You might like it better than the chicken one.”

“Oh- yes?” Naruto seemed uncertain, even as he held his hands out to take the bowl.

“Careful,” Teuchi waved away his hands and put the bowl down on the counter. “It’s very hot, let it cool for a bit.”

Obito sank into the middle seat of the serving counter, unable to cope with reality. Naruto was here in his mother’s favourite restaurant, while ANBU was going nuts trying to find him, about to declare war on his behalf. She was two seats away from a kid she was forbidden contact with, watching him stare with wide-eyed fascination at his raman toppings. What was she going to do now?

A bowl appeared on the wooden counter she was staring at blankly, the smell of it tugging at a dozen more bittersweet memories. Kakashi had mastered the art of eating without revealing his face here, Rin had covered the whole counter with flashcards to study for her medic-exams, Obito had walked in here late a dozen time or more, apologies echoing around the small warm space.

“Is shoya still your favourite flavour?” Teuchi asked gruffly, back at his chopping board.

Obito had always pretended miso was his favourite, like Rin. But he had really loved the shouya Teuchi made the most, the strong taste of soy mixing with the sweetness of the mushrooms perfectly. Obito didn’t stop to ponder how Teuchi recognised the young boy Obito in the grown badly-scared woman before him. She just accepted the bowl placed before her, perfectly arranged with extra toppings.

Obito swallowed, wiped her hands on her pants legs and took up the chopsticks resting across the bowl. “Thanks for the food.” She said softly and lifted a few long noodles to her mouth. The flavour brought tears to her eyes. The ghosts of her teammates, alive and dead, hovered heavily over her heart.

“Too hot?” a voice demanded. She glanced sideways to see Naruto resting his head on the counter next to his bowl, openly staring at her. “You should wait, like me.”

Obito chewed slowly, trying to think. She really should drag the kid back to the orphanage fast and pray no one saw her doing it. Or send up a flare outside to summon the ANBU and get away before they turned up.

But Teuchi had to know Naruto shouldn’t be here alone. What was his game? Was her food poisoned? She hadn’t thought of that.

“I like my food hot.” She finally said in response to Naruto’s question. “But I don’t like egg. Swap you my egg for your bamboo?” If Teuchi had poisoned her food to keep her from telling, he wouldn’t want Naruto eating some of it.
“Okay!” Naruto said brightly putting out his hand. Obito looked at his bare hand, tiny and soft, not a callus or cut to be seen on his grubby hands, then dropped her hot egg into his bowl instead.

“You shouldn’t mix the flavours.” Teuchi grumbled, but he put a spoon down for Naruto to dig out his bamboo shoots for Obito. So her food wasn’t poisoned then. While Naruto made a mess of his bowl Obito took a bigger mouthful of food and tried to think. Why was a 3-year-old orphan out eating ramen by himself after dark. He’d been noticed missing at lunch time, didn’t someone spot him wandering around, somewhere between the orphanage and Ichiraku. Hadn’t Kakashi told her he had around the clock protection, what had happened to them?

“So…what did you do today?” she asked in a light tone of voice. She half-hoped Naruto would know not to talk to strangers but seeing as he just accepted food from her she doubted it.

“I saw this cool bug, you know! It had horns on its head and it wee-weed on me when I picked it up!” Naruto cheerfully told her, giving up on fishing out bamboo for her and eating with the spoon instead. “It smelled so bad Old Lady Sora wanted me to have another bath, but I had one yesterday, so I didn’t need a bath again. It went away after a while.” He picked up his bowl to slurp some broth. “I tried to find more of those bugs to put in Old Lady’s bed…”

“Why did you want to put bugs in her bed?” Obito asked, taking another bite of food despite herself. The broth was so warm and tasty, and she only had only eaten half of Kyoko’s lunch that day. She slurped up more before she finished chewing the first mouthful.

“Because she locked me in the bathroom to have a bath and I had to climb out the window to get out!” Naruto smacked the counter with an open palm. “I had to go over the whole roof and climb down the pipes and fell in the leaves!”

Alright.” So now she knew how he got away from the orphanage, but not where his shinobi guards were in all of this. “Then what did you do?”

“I looked for bugs in the leaves, then in the forest.” Naruto was now eating with a spoon in one hand and a single chopstick in the other. “I crawled and crawled, but I didn’t find any more bugs.”

If he got out of the orphanage unexpectedly and disappeared into the undergrowth before the ANBU spotted him that might explain his lack of guards, if they had lost track of him and assumed he had been kidnapped.

“Was it soon after breakfast or close to lunchtime?” Naruto disappearance had been noticed at lunchtime, but maybe he had been missing for longer.

“Ummm-“Naruto screwed up his face. “I looked for bugs for a long long time then got hungry. I came out of the forest to go back but everyone I saw yelled at me and wouldn’t tell me where I was. So I ate some yellow berries I found. They gave me a tummy ache, but they tasted good.” He stuffed the egg in his cheek like a squirrel with a nut. “I got here and everyone was ignoring me so this old guy called me in and gave me ramen!” he said happily, bits of yolk flying out of his mouth.

“Right,” Obito said momentarily stunned. The only berries in season now were mildly poisonous. And who would ignore a little lost boy? He had to be exaggerating that bit. “How are you feeling now? Is your tongue tingling at all?” She looked around blankly as if she expected to find a medic kit to use.

“It went all fat and weird in my mouth after I ate the berries!” Naruto grinned and stuck out his normal looking tongue. “I couldn’t talk!”
Teuchi produced a carton of milk and put it on the table, exchanging worried looks with Obito. Milk was sometimes a counter to toxins in the stomach, though it must have been far too late for it to do anything for Naruto. “Growing boys need milk.” He muttered, reaching down under the counter for a glass.

“All right!” Naruto picked up the carton and drank from it before the glass could be put on the table. He drank enough to get Obito worried he was going to choke before putting it down and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. A hand that had handled bug stink and poisonous berries...

Abruptly Obito abandoned her concerns over her own wellbeing. Let her be in trouble, let the Hokage blind her. She needed to get this kid to a medic right away, before she found out he had broken bones from wild animals or something.

“Well,” she pushed away her still full bowl. “It’s getting late and you’ve have a busy day. Let’s get you home.”

“Noooo!” Naruto shouted. “I haven’t finished my ramen!” he clutched the bowl as if she was going to take it from him.

Obito closed her eyes and counted to ten. “Of course, I meant you can finish first.” She lied. “I need to pay for the food.” She reached for the bit of money Kyoko had given her in her bag.

Teuchi shook his head as he took her bowl. “Your teacher left enough credit on his tab. Keep your money.”

Obito bit her lip and said nothing as Naruto pointedly ate his food very slowly. This day seemed determined to break her. She put the money into her jacket sleeve.

“I’m staying. You go home” Naruto muttered into his bowl, not looking at her. Clearly, he had his own ideas on what he needed to do.

Obito counted to ten again. “But I can’t go home.” She said calmly. “My leg is hurting too much. I need to go to the hospital. But I can’t walk by myself.” She reached down and pulled up her pants leg, revealing her false leg above her boots “See?”

“Wow!” Naruto stared at her metal leg, then looked up at her and for the first time seemed to take in her facial scars. “Are you a ninja Auntie? Did a bad guy cut off your leg? Did a lion eat it? How big was the lion?”

“I’ll tell you all about it if you walk with me to the hospital.” Obito said in a forced cheerful tone of voice. “Where’s your jacket?” Naruto wore shorts and a t-shirt, with open sandals that imitated the one’s shinobi used. But most children only started wearing sandals in winter once they joined the academy and learnt how to manipulate chakra to keep their feet warm and dry, which meant Naruto’s feet should be freezing in the winter night.

“In the cupboard.”

Obito looked around for a cupboard, then looked at Naruto again. “The cupboard under the stairs.” He elaborated, licking his spoon.

“The cupboard at the orphanage you mean?” she realised with sinking emotions.

Naruto nodded, scraping out the last bits of chopped vegetables from his empty bowl.

“Right.” Obito sighed and stood up, reluctantly unzipping her brown jacket. “Here you go then. It’s
cold out there.” She took off her favourite jacket, brown with the orange lining she had added herself, plus seal upon seal embroidered into the sleeves. It was the jacket she had worn the day kidnappers had invaded the Uchiha compound to take her, the jacket that had defended Chikia and three other Uchiha children with its seals. Obito held it out to a scowling little boy, who did not want to wear a coat in the cold winter night.

*  

It took some convincing, but Obito got Naruto into the jacket and out of the stall, walking slowly in the dark towards the tower looming out over everything around it. Instead of hearing Obito’s story, Naruto was caught up in his own story of how a bad lion ate her leg and Naruto was going to fight it and get her leg back for her. Obito was too caught up in her own thoughts to really be moved by his words. Was this the right thing to do? Should she be taking him to the hospital at all? How much trouble were both going to be in?

(If she picked him up and ran home, how far would she get before they got caught?)

“Hold my hand please.” She said when he started shivering like her against the cold. His blue eyes widened at that and he grabbed her offered hand with both of his own, hurting her with his grip. She fought back the impulse to flinch and recoil, and after a few steps he relaxed his hold letting her readjust their hands so she was touching the jacket sleeve. She activated the warming seals on it, wishing she had thought to add the same seals to the Uchiha shirt she was wearing. It’s high collar and long sleeves were limited protection against the cold.

“It’s dark.” Naruto said as they turned down the darkened main road to the Tower. “Will the lion get us?”

“What lion?”

“The lion that ate your leg!”

“Oh, that lion.” Obito didn’t bother to try changing Naruto’s mind about the non-existent lion. “Well if you turn and let me touch that pattern on your elbow…no the other one… the other one… Naruto look where I’m pointing…”

Eventually Obito got her hand on the right embroidered seal and summoned a small ball of light, like the ones she had made in Anko’s tiny apartment. She gave it to Naruto who clutched it to his chest with his free hand, wide-eyed with amazement. All fears of the lion vanished.

They were in sight of the tower’s main entrance when a team of ANBU appeared around them, their white masks stark against the night’s darkness. Obito tightened her grip on Naruto’s hand and prepared to shunshin them into the relative safety of the Tower. Then she realised she knew who these ANBU were, from the Cat masked figure of Yuugao to the tall gangly figure in the Ram mask and the slight Panda who stood behind them. The Captain of the team lingered on a nearby rooftop. Obito forced herself not to look over at the tall figure in the Rat mask, irritable pug at his feet. She needed to keep her emotions in check for Naruto.

Then the last member of the team appeared in front of her, familiar though she had never truly meet the brown-haired boy. He was the smallest ANBU Obito had ever seen, still clad in a uniform similar to the one she had seen him wear in Kakashi’s memories, though the Dog mask on his face was new.

“We’ll take it from here, Ma’am.” Tenzo said in a monotone, making Obito’s eyes raise at his young voice and the term of address. In Kakashi’s memories she hadn’t registered how young the little mokuton user was.
“Aren’t you a little short to be ANBU?” she demanded, which made him slump his shoulders a bit. One of the other ANBU snickered.

“I’m walking Auntie!” Naruto announced at the same time. “A bad lion ate her leg and I gotta protect her!”

“Panda can walk the Uchiha home, you must come with me now-“

“Nooooo.” Naruto screamed abruptly, sinking to his knees and dropping the ball of light. “I wanna walk Auntie. I wanna I wanna I wanna!!” he howled across the empty street.

The four ANBU tensed up at the normal reactions of a tired 3-year-old and Tenzo made a gesture, wood forming around his arm and fist. Obito rolled her eyes. Naruto had impressive volume, but she’d borne the brunt of worse tantrums. Little Fuji could reach ear popping pitches with her screeching and Sasuke once held his breath in protest over bedtime so long he passed out.

“He says he escaped out a bathroom window this morning from the orphanage.” She said calmly, talking over the yelling child next to her. “I don’t think Kumo had anything to do with his disappearance, but he did mention eating some yew berries and some people throwing things at him. He should be looked over by a medic.”

“Why is he with you?” Ram demanded. Yuugao nudged him hard, deathglare felt from under her cat mask.

“I was walking to the police station when I spotted him. Sweet-talked him into coming with me. Someone needs to teach him stranger danger…” she looked down at the boy, still on the ground but winding down in his yells of protest. “Let me just tell him what’s going on.”

With a wince of pain from her legs she knelt down to speak to Naruto at his level. “You’re such a kind boy Naruto.” She said in a softer tone, leaning down a bit. “You really want to walk me home, don’t you?”

Naruto looked up at her in surprise, still breathing hard from his howling.

“But I didn’t realise how late it’s gotten! Look how dark it is!” She pointed up at the dark sky. “And look how many people were looking for you! I’m sure Lady Sora is very very worried.”

“No.” Naruto muttered looking down at the ball of light he had dropped on the ground. “Don’t wanna.”

“If you let this nice ANBU take you to the hospital then home, I’ll let you keep the light ball. Would you like that?”

“No,” he said to the ground, “No hospital.”

“But they give treats to good little boys. Don’t you want a treat?” Obito coxed, praying the medic he saw would have some kind of sweet or little gift for him.

“-es” Naruto admitted to the ground.

“So you’ll go with the ANBU to the hospital for a check-up and treat?”

“-es,” Naruto agreed, still looking down.

“What a good boy!” She gave in to her instincts and wrapped her arms around him, smelling his little
boy smell under the less enduring aroma of sweat, dirt and bugstink. After a moment Naruto relaxed in her hug but didn’t hug back. That was probably a good thing. It was a struggle for Obito let go, step back and let Ram come forward to swing him up into his strong arms.

“Bye-bye Au-“ Naruto called waving his light ball, but Ram was already running, up the side of the nearest building and along the rooftop, into a tower window in the time it took Obito to realise he still had on her jacket. Her favourite jacket, with seals on it and money in its pocket.

“This day has been awful.” She told Tenzo, as Panda followed after Ram and Cat melted away into the shadows once more. “Tell me honestly, is the treaty still good? Did we accuse Kumo of anything yet?”

“A runner was sent after the team escorting Kumo the second you were spotted with the boy.” Tenzo told her. “Receding the orders to torture them for information at dawn tomorrow. The treaty should hold.”

“Yay,” Obito said without enthusiasm. “I’m too tired for war. And you’re too young to be out this late. Didn’t your clan give you a curfew?”

The young boy turned his masked face up to her. “Excuse me?”

“You can’t be older than twelve, I can’t believe your family let you join ANBU.”

Tenzo stared at her, looked around in confusion then muttered to himself for a bit. Finally, he spoke to her, “I- alright? But what clan are you talking about?”

Obito shivered, utterly done with the cold of the night, “You know- the Senju… I’m surprised they’re risking their heir since you’re the first one since Hashirama with the Mokuton.” She gestured to his wrist, still covered in protective bark armour. Hopefully he would assume that was how she knew who and what he was.

The Dog masked ANBU let the forgotten wooden armour on his arm melt away. “I’m not a Senju! I wasn’t- the Mokuton was given to me, I wasn’t born with it-“ he tried to explain in frustration.

Obito tilted her head as she tugged the high collar closer to her neck. She had to be careful not to hint she knew who Tenzo was from viewing Kakashi’s memories of their mission to Orochimaru’s lab, but she really didn’t understand what his issue was. If a child popped up anywhere in Fire Country with the Sharingan, or even just with Uchiha like features and no clan to speak for them, then they could be adopted into the clan. Why had Tenzo escaped such a fate from the Senju?

“So what? You have it now and no one else does and you don’t have another clan claiming you. Didn’t the clan elders explain…” she realised something. “Sarutobi didn’t tell the Senju about you did he?” she narrowed her eyes.

“Maybe he did and they just didn’t care!” Tenzo shot back angrily. Then he shrank back, as if scared of his own outburst.

“Ha!” Obito laughed hollowly. “Their heir has been rogue for almost twenty years. The Senju elders would eat their own fingers to have a new Mokuton user, no matter how you got it. Trust me. If you ever want out of ANBU, you go to the old district just left of the Hokage monument. They’ll welcome you with open arms-“

“We have to go.” Rat interrupted, leaping down from rooftop shadows he had been lurking in. Obito held her ground as he walked up to them, but it was difficult. She had so much she wanted to say to him. “You will be contacted if we require further information.” He said without looking at Obito.
The dog masked ANBU looked even smaller as his captain gestured for him to follow him. Obito could now see that Rat had his grey hair hidden under black material attached to his mask, like the cloth mask he wore under his new Rat mask. If Obito didn’t know Kakashi’s chakra like she knew her own, if her chakra wasn’t pulsing softly from the eye and seal under white porcelain, if she had been anyone else, she might have been fooled by his mask change.

“Ka- Captain,” Obito stopped herself from revealing his identity to any other lurkers that might still be there in the dark. “What was I supposed to do? I wasn’t looking for him I swear, he just turned up. I couldn’t walk away from him. I couldn’t.”

Kakashi already had his back to her, but his bunched-up shoulders showed his reaction to her words.

“He was alone all day, no one noticed him missing for hours. That’s not safe. Not for any three-year-old. He said people ignored him the whole day. He deserves better.”

Kakashi used shunshin to disappear with a bare burst of air and chakra. Tenzo looked back at Obito awkwardly, raised his arm to almost waved goodbye, then shunshined away himself with a bigger gust of leaves. Obito was left completely alone, a stone’s throw from the tower door.

It was cold. She wanted her jacket back. Her legs hurt. Her shoulder hurt. Her face scars hurt in the cold wind. Her stomach hurt from the stress of the day. She didn’t want to go into the tower and deal with everything again. Her mind slowly shut down letting her think of nothing, slumping her head so her face was mostly covered by the high collar of her Uchiha shirt. The long wide sleeves let her tuck her hands together into a kind of muff. She backed into a sheltered spot under a first story window and closed her eyes focusing on making her internal chakra heat up her skin just a tiny bit. She just didn’t care about anything anymore, she just wanted to be warm and this day to end.

* 

It might have been minutes later, or maybe hours, when a voice shook her from her daze. “I FOUND HER!”

A hand came up to gently cup her cheek. “You’re frozen, Obito. How long have you been out here?”

Obito opened her eyes and her cousin Sakuya stood before her, pretty face stricken with worry. They hadn’t spoken in months. Sakuya had cut her hair in a charming bob and was out of her police uniform for once.

“Put this on,” Sakuya was unbuttoning her quilted jacket, about to take it off.

“No.” Obito managed to say, grabbing her hands. “It’s cold, you need it.”

“Your hands are freezing Obito and you’re as pale as a ghost…” Sakuya pulled away from her hands, opened her jacket and pulled Obito into a hug, wrapping the coat around them both. “I thought they finally got you…”

“Sakuya-“ Obito said quietly, not sure of what she was going to say.

“Yeah, yeah, I know. I’m sorry too. I was so mad at you, for doing the same thing as me. It was selfish. We should both be allowed to be happy-“

“We broke up,” Obito muttered into Sakuya’s chest. “It wasn’t fair to him, how I treated him. He deserved better.”
Sakuya’s shoulders slumped and she squeezed her tighter. “I’m sorry, Kiddo. That sucks.”

“Yeah, it really does.” The last bits of numbness and apathy left Obito and she finally was able to cry into her big cousin’s arms, glad one thing had been fixed on that terrible day.

*

Obito got taken to the clan sauna and made to stay there until she was truly warm again. When she refused to stay at her Aunt Izunami’s for the night, she got a seat at the kiddy table and her own omurice to finish before she was allowed to go home.

Sakuya went home with her, which turned out for the best as Kamo was in an uncooperative mood and had been refusing to eat until Obito got home. Sakuya gamely sat down with them to eat most of Obito’s cold dinner and coax Kamo into eating enough of his own, much stern and inflexible than Obito could ever bear to be with her grandfather. Obito left them as soon as she felt she could and went to bed.

But she couldn’t sleep, the day had been so long and so emotional – her head reeled with thoughts and memories. The looming bookcase she would be stuck fruitlessly searching through for useful information on sewage and plumbing, the sewing on the ANBU uniforms and if she had done her best when she had worked so quickly. The cheerful Kyoko and the uncertain Yuugao. The feel of Naruto’s hands clenching tightly on hers and the sight of Kakashi’s back as he walked away. Her stomach knotted with uncertainty.

Everything was fine, she told herself. The Hokage or the orphanage or someone would fix it so Naruto didn’t ever get loose again for so long. He’d learn not to run off on his own. Just like she’d learn to deal with her heart pains every time Kakashi walked away from her.

Sakuya came into Obito’s room two hours later, though Obito had thought she would go home again.

“Obito? Kamo’s asleep. I locked up the house but I’m leaving this door open so we can hear if he gets up. I’m climbing in with you, mind your weapons.” Sakuya climbed over Obito to the side of her bed against the wall, police baton and sword under one arm. “I can’t be bothered with setting up another futon and I said I’d stay in case Kamo needs help in the night,” She was dressed in sleeping clothes of the same soft type of fabric as Obito’s bright orange ones. Izunami had made her daughter cherry red shorts with sakura buttons on the shirt, the closest shade to pink Sakuya was ever prepared to wear.

“You don’t have to,” Obito said, not raising her head from her pillow. “I’m not going to sleep deeply tonight.”

“Still getting nightmares? Isn’t that why you go to those weird group meetings with the clanless injured?” Sakuya put her baton under her pillow and squirmed under the covers.

“The meetings do help. But it’s been a really rough month…”

“Yeah. I get that.”

There was silence for a bit as the cousins shifted a bit and tried to get comfortable among the bed sheets and weapons each of them held. Obito had shared a bed with Sakuya often growing up, when Sakuya needed a night away from her crowded home or both Obito’s grandparents were too busy to mind her. They knew each other sleeping quirks. Or they had, before the war.

They lay together, not touching, and failed to sleep.
“Hey…” Sakuya said into the loud silence of the house.

Obito didn’t look away from her staring contest with the bedroom ceiling. “Yeah?” If she squinted her eyes and focused her chakra senses she could just see the first wards she had ever set up, still glowing faintly from the over charge of chakra she had given it.

“I am sorry Obito, I overreacted. When I found you with… you know…”

Obito didn’t say anything. She waited.

“I think I acted like that because… because I was jealous.”

Obito turned over to look at Sakuya in disbelief, “Really?”

“Yes,” Sakuya avoided her stare, “Sumiya and I… I’ve never spent the night at her place, not the whole night. I always have to sneak out before someone notices I’m missing. I’ve never had a chance to just wake up next to her and just be with her. I was so worried about you, when I found out you had been kidnapped. Then rescued, but no one knew where you were…I went to Hakate’s house to beg for his help. I was going to threaten him into helping me find you.” Sakuya turned over, away from Obito towards the wall. “But there you were, in his bed, in his shirt. And you were unharmed… I was so angry at you. For getting what I wanted.”

Obito didn’t have a response to that. She had spent her life with the bedrock certainty that Sakuya was better than her. It was such a fact of life to her that Obito had never bothered to fight it. The sky was blue, Uchiwa were red, Sakuya Uchiha was better than Obito in every way that mattered.

“Sumiya is going to break up with me soon.” Sakuya whispered to the wall. “I can sense it. She’s tired of sneaking around and lying to people. She wants to tell people about us.”

Gingerly Obito shifted a little closer to her older cousin. “Why can’t you tell people then? There’s no pregnancy risk, the bloodline is safe, you’ve got four blood-brothers. You could marry her and maybe adopt one of your brothers’ kids in a couple of yea-”

“She won’t leave her family. She’s got a father and little sister, she won’t leave them to become an Uchiha.” Sakuya punched the mattress with her fist, “And why should she anyway! We’ve only been seeing each other for little over a year- I love her now, but maybe that won’t last?”

Obito rolled away, onto her back “Do you really believe that?” she asked carefully.

Sakuya gave a deep sigh. “No. I can’t see myself not loving her, not even if she breaks up with me. Sumiya is just so smart and confident and cute and she brings me tea every day because she thinks the station coffee could cause me heartburn. And she gets me, like really gets me. I’m not Sakuya, police sergeant and upstart mission baby with no father. I’m just her Sakuya. I can tell her anything and even if she doesn’t understand, she’ll accept me.”

Obito’s heart burnt with every beat. Shame and longing and self-hate. She’d had that before. With Rin, as friends; and with Kakashi for six short months. Before her misplaced anger made her turn on him and his misplaced guilt meant he had let her hurt him. Gai had explained it to her, how much Obito meant to Kakashi, how much he had built his life around her words and actions. Kakashi had loved the idea of her far too much for the relationship to ever be equal and healthy. She had to let him go.

There was silence again for a long time.

“Why…” Obito started to speak very softly, almost hoping Sakuya had fallen asleep. “Why don’t
you marry into her family then? If you love each other so much.”

Sakuya turned over and stared at Obito in disbelief, her eyes wide. “Really? Really?!?” she demanded. “Do you even know what you’re saying? If I do that then I leave the clan forever, I lose everything. My job, where I had to work for years and deal with all kinds of crap to get the rank of sergeant. I might make Police Captain one day; did you know that? If I marry Sumiya I would have to move out and never visit the compound again. My mother would never speak to me again, my brothers would shun me in the street… I don’t even want to know what the elders would do about my Sharingan… And what would I even do with my life if I left. If I wasn’t an Uchiha? Be a run of the mill jounin in the general forces? Keep a house for my doctor wife and learn all her families’ customs instead of our own? Become a jounin-sensei?”

“I wouldn’t shun you-“

“If I left, the elders would lose it, they’d have you married and knocked up a month after I left. You wouldn’t have time to sneak away and visit me.”

“They’re going to get me married and knocked up anyway. One of us should at least try to end up happy. And what’s wrong with being a jounin-sensei, I’d love to be one!” Obito felt hurt by the matter fact way Sakuya laid out the facts. The matter fact way she acknowledged the truth.

Sakuya snorted. “You would. You like kids. No. I’m just going to enjoy being with Sumiya as long as she lets me, then let her go. I’ll be miserable forever after but it’s the right choice to make.”

Fuck you. Obito’s thoughts shot out angrily. You’ve already given up on your so-called love. If I had half a chance of being with Kakashi-

Her thoughts fizzled out after that, stopping to actually realise what she was thinking- because there was no way she would really want to leave her family, just for one man.

Not really. She couldn’t leave Kamo and Sakuya, her aunt and other cousins, Shisui and Itachi, Mai, Osuma, … She couldn’t NOT be an Uchiha, her whole identity was built around her family name. If she wasn’t an Uchiha, even the useless Uchiha, then what was she?

“Obito? Are you seriously crying because of me and Sumiya?”

“A little for you, a little for me.” Obito admitted through her tears. “I’ve got a lot going on in my head right now.”

“Don’t strain your brain too much.” Sakuya reached over to pat her cheek gently. “There’s no point in fussing over things you can’t change.” She pulled away and turned over, facing the wall again.

Obito lay awake for a long time, listening to Sakuya fall into the soft even breaths of sleep. She lost herself in formless thoughts. Why was she so angry with Sakuya for thinking the same way Obito had, not thinking their feelings were worth the trouble it would cause if the clan found out. The love of one person can’t outweigh the love of an entire clan. What would Obito even be if she did leave her clan? Nothing, she was nothing without her family.

Finally Obito dropped into a nightmare haunted sleep.

*

Obito woke up to a commotion inside the house, raised voices and a loud thump. Fearing for Kamo she grabbed a handful of weapons and her bedside crutch, foregoing wasting time putting on her prosthetic leg. She got to the corridor to see Sakuya pinning Jiraiya down to the floor with her police
“What is going on?” Obito demanded, wondering if she should mention the amount of leg Sakuya was showing in her rumpled sleeping shorts as she straddled the man.

“This creep managed to break in!” she hissed, pressing down firmly with her baton as her free hand gripped his scalp harshly.

“I was the one who set up the seals!” Long white hair was wrapped around his face as Jiraiya squirmed enough to get some breath to talk. “I brought food! For breakfast,” he jerked his head down to his hand, which was clutching a food bag.

“A likely story, some old pervert breaking into my cousin’s home just to bring breakfast,” Sakuya’s Sharingan spun as she stared down at him. “Who the hell do you think you are?!”

“Sakuya. Jiraiya is my fuuinjutsu teacher…” Obito said awkwardly, alarmed at her cousin’s violence and Jiraiya’s act as a defenceless man. “And I think he’s enjoying having you kneel and choke him a bit too much.”

“Eww, gross,” Sakuya moved off his torso quickly, baton still held out as a threat and stepped back to stand between the Sannin and Obito.

Jiraiya coughed and rubbed his neck theatrically. “I almost passed out.” He looked up at their unamused faces and dropped the act, standing up smoothly. “I thought I’d check on my little student and see how her first day at the tower went. I didn’t expect you to have a friend over.” He gave Sakuya’s sleep rumpled figure a slow once over.

“This is my first cousin, Sakuya, who once blinded a man with his own hand for groping her. Sakuya this is my jounin-sensei’s sensei, in whose memory I refrain from spitting at him…”

Jiraiya gave her a cheerful smile. Sakuya gave him the patented Uchiha look of utter disgust. “This is the last loyal Sannin?”

A noise came from Jiraiya. Indignation or objection Obito couldn’t say. She didn’t really care. She hadn’t seen Jiraiya in months and the discovery of Naruto’s existence had all but soured any affection for him she had held.

She touched Sakuya’s arm gently. “I can deal with him, you go get dressed and maybe bring me my leg? I’ll get breakfast going.”

“Flare your chakra if you need help.” Sakuya gave Jiraiya one more warning look before walking away.

He watched her go with a forlorn look. “Why are the gorgeous ones always so mean.”

“Probably because they have to deal with perverts like you.” Obito told him tiredly. She really wished she could go back to bed, or even just dress and tie up her messy hair. But Jiraiya was her responsibility and at least her sleeping clothes covered her body from neck to ankle. “What are you doing here so early?” She went to the kitchen and got out the makings of miso soup.

“I arrived in the village a while ago, I thought I’d check up on you, see why you stopped writing to me.” Jiraiya followed and seated himself in the best chair in the kitchen, Kamo’s chair, without asking. “Does the Seal licence make you think you don’t need your old teacher anymore?”

“You told me and anyone who would listen I wasn’t your student.” Obito told him moodily, getting
the kettle full with one hand, other hand on her crutch. She was used to having her prosthetic leg off while in the house, but having an unexpected guest made her nervous. Usually she left her crutch in her room and just hopped or shuffled about using her knees and hands. She didn’t feel relaxed enough to that in front of Jiraiya now.

“Don’t be so touchy, I sponsored you for the seal exams, didn’t I?”

“Did you? No one seemed to care much or expect me to be halfway capable.”

“The old masters who run the process give everyone a hard time. They don’t like to admit seal study has moved on since the founder’s days. Since you got through on the first try you must have had one of the younger masters as a tester, a monk or one of the Uzushio survivor’s children?”

Obito smiled without humour. “Yes, both of those… and an ANBU captain old enough to remember the fall of Uzushio and an advisor to the Hokage.”

Jiraiya’s grip on the table corner tightened slightly as he shifted.

Obito continued as if she didn’t notice. “They seemed conflicted at my attempts, almost like they didn’t want me to pass-”

“Like I said, they don’t like newcomers, especially non-Uzushio. They didn’t like the last apprentice I entered either.” There was silence as the unspoken spectre of Minato loomed over them both. Jiraiya cleared his throat noisily and continued carelessly “.. Which elder was is that sat on your exam? Homura… Koharu…” Obito looked at him out of the corner of his eye as she measured out rice. Did he seem nervous, was he about to ask about the Hokage’s other advisor?

Sakuya came stomping in, dressed in her full police uniform with weapons blatantly displayed on her belt. “Okay, I’ll take over. You go get dressed, you have work soon too.”

Obito skipped a shower and dressed slowly, going over ways to bring up Naruto. So speaking of old students, did any of them have kids? No, too passive. Hey asshole when were you gonna tell me about Naruto- No too aggressive. Could she try guilt? Did guilt even work on Jiraiya, seeing as he obviously was happy having Naruto in the situation he was.

When she came back to the kitchen, Kamo was up as well and gloomily contemplating the pile of pills and medications he had to take. He was sitting in his usual seat, which meant either he or Sakuya had made Jiraiya move to another chair.

“Why did I start taking this bright blue one?” Kamo asked as Sakuya set a large glass of water next to his collection of daily pills.

“It’s a replacement for the small white ones, they should give you less headaches.” Obito noticed that Sakuya had put a glass of water and a few of the more usual for-seniors pills in front of Jiraiya, who was looking incredibly uncomfortable. His eyes darted to Kamo, in his old dressing gown with spills from dinner Obito had forgotten to wash off once he slept, to the overflowing cabinet of pills and charts Sakuya was looking through. “We don’t have coffee Sakuya, sorry.”

“These have caffeine in them,” Sakuya waved a green glass bottle. “Can I have two of them?”

“I suppose so but be careful. They’re for when we need Kamo to be lucid and awake. I think they’re addictive if you have too many.” Obito took her own glass of water and half full pill box. “Thanks for the food.”

Jiraiya looked around the table as the four of them tucked into breakfast, each with pills and glass of
water alongside rice, miso and the grilled fish he had brought. There was mismatched crockery made up of Obito and Kamo’s favourite bowls and cups, plus the plate Sakuya always used when she ate with them. Jiraiya’s tall frame fitted awkwardly on his side of the table, a head taller than any of them even while sitting. He smiled hesitantly and swallowed a pill for prostate trouble.

Sakuya passed Kamo the rice bowl and while he slowly spooned out his helping she turned her glare back on Jiraiya. “I am going to find out who was on gate duty when you broke in this morning and there will be consequences.”

“Last time I was here you guys were a lot more relaxed,” Jiraiya complained accepting the rice bowl when Kamo was finally done. “I ate at your restaurant two years back and no one batted an eye.”

“That was probably because it was broad daylight and the kidnap attempts for Obito hadn’t started yet,” Sakuya told him dropping the pills with caffeine into her glass of hot water and watching it closely.

“Can’t you do something about those,” Obito asked as she swallowed her own water with various pain meds and joint supplements. “The great wall’s wards should be stopping some of the invaders,”

“The seal barrier chiefs claim all invaders this past year used inside information to get in and high-level traitors are to be blamed…” Jiraiya picked up his fish in one piece and chewed on it lingeringly while Obito and Sakuya gave each other looks. Orochimaru was still causing trouble for Konoha. “They say it will take weeks to reset the wards in a different way and the whole thing would have to be down for a day at least. We can’t risk having no barrier at all right now.”

“They can’t risk it, you mean.” Sakuya said bitterly. “We’re the only ones suffering with things at it stands now.”

“That’s not true Sakuya! Think of the Hyuuga. Think of the other clans that must be threatened too,” Obito exclaimed, almost choking around a mouthful of rice. “I’m sure when the Kumo situation is finally settled they’ll reset the wall’s seals… do you think I could watch?” Obito asked Jiraiya animatedly. “I’d stay inside the village but watching something that big, would be good for my education, wouldn’t it.”

Jariya shrugged. “Those four chiefs are a cagey lot, they probably wouldn’t let me watch if I was around when it happened. You can ask…”

“We should have known.” Kamo said randomly to himself. “What kind of child renames themselves after a snake demon.” He was glaring at a blank space on the kitchen wall. “An unhappy one, but no one dared say anything. And now look at us,” he gestured to the table, “We are stagnating, not expanding as we were promised.” He ate the last of his breakfast neatly while the rest of the table stared at him.

“So… they want me to put seals on the new sewage pipes,” Obito said, filling in the awkward silence. “I have to research the Nidaime’s notebooks and try to recreate what he used on the current ones. I’ve got months before I have to start on actual pipework.”

“They always give you the dull work first when you start out. I had to reseal every civilian emergency room in the village and beyond. Sometimes I still dream I’m writing out thousands of light-up direction signs. ‘No smoking, no chakra, no unnecessary talking, remain seated until the all clear is given.’” Jiraiya rolled his eyes.

“Try saying that every week in the bars on pay day.” Sakuya sighed and gulped down her dissolved caffeine pills with a grimace. “That is disgusting. I have to go find real caffeine before work. Obito?
“You’ll be okay with these old men?”

“Hey!” Jiraiya acted offended. Kamo just smiled and patted her hand. Obito nodded and Sakuya left to grab her bag. Obito got up to start washing dishes. Jiraiya brought over his own plate.

“I have work in a few hours too. What did you really want to talk to me about?” she asked quietly, the running sink covering her voice from Kamo.

“You stopped writing back to me, I wanted to make sure you were alright.”

“I’m fine,” Obito noisily started washing dishes. “Naruto’s not though.”

Jiraiya looked at her open eyed confusion. “Who is-“

“Don’t you dare try lying to me.” She hissed.

Jiraiya glanced away, “-who told you. About him.”

“No one. I saw him one day in the street and knew, right away where he came from. And I worked out what he was soon after. My whole family lied to my face about him and called me mad. I had to confront Kakashi about him… I didn’t deal with the truth well.”

Understatement. The guilt of her hitting Kakashi made her abandon the sink to walk away, before she turned on Jiraiya as well. “Grandfather! Let’s get you dressed,” She smiled at Kamo, who was running a finger through the left food on Sakuya’s plate.

“No,” he said stubbornly

“Yes!” Obito insisted

“No,” He stuck out his lip

“No,” Obito said cheerfully as if she was agreeing with him.

“Yes?”

“Alright you win. You can get dressed now.”

Kamo gave her a look, like he vaguely knew she had tricked him but wasn’t completely certain. He got up reluctantly and let Obito lead him to his room, leaving Jiraiya alone in the kitchen.

Kamo could dress himself and get ready for the day unaided, but someone needed to check his clothes matched and were suited for the day and he didn’t lose interest halfway and wander off to do something else. Leaving him dressed and playing with an old jar of dried seeds Obito came back to the kitchen to see Jiraiya had cleaned the table and dishes, though the glasses and table would need to be rewashed.

“I don’t see what the problem is. The boy is safe enough where he is, food every day and plenty of company. Many kids have it worse.”

Obito growled, taking up a sponge to scrub at the stove. “Other kids don’t live in a village their parents died protecting. Other kids don’t get called names and mistreated because of something beyond his control. Other kids-” She lowered her voice, “-are not the child of your student and my teacher. There must be someone who can raise him. One of your other students? Or a friend of Kushina’s. Don’t either of them have any living family?”
Jiraiya sighed deeply and stared down into the sink of dirty water. “Anyone claiming to be related to Minato or Kushina puts themselves into serious risk, doubly so if they adopt their son,” He rubbed his face with still soapy knuckles. “I got back to Konoha less than a week after the attack. I missed all but the last of the funerals. The shock and horror had worn off but then, but the village teemed with rage and uncertainty,” Jiraiya told her woodenly. “I was only allowed to remain in Konoha long enough to pay my respects, get a full report of the incident and look at Minato’s seal. They didn’t even let me hold him,” He stopped washing and just stared into the dirty sink water. “Not that I wanted to. The Kyuubi’s chakra still lingered over the baby, making his skin feverish and the air around him smell of sulphur. No wonder so many believed Minato had just forced the beast into human form, not sealed it away into a human vessel.”

“So you just left the village and your student’s orphaned newborn, to do your own thing,” Obito accused him, throwing the sponge in the sink.

Jiraiya shrugged. “Sensei wanted me to cut off all reports and rumours of the attack from reaching the Fire Daimyo. He needed time to consolidate his position as Hokage again, before outsiders tried to stick their noses in and call for elections. We didn’t have time to suffer civilians stumbling around asking stupid questions. Or worse, stop their funding.”

Obito grabbed onto the edge of the stove and squeezed tightly.

“The two friends Kushina had with her during the birth died in the first wave of the attack, Minato’s merchant cousins changed their names and left, they didn’t have enough power to defend themselves from his enemies. My last surviving student lost his arm in the attack. He killed himself two days after I left the village again…”

Obito hadn’t known that. Minato’s sensei’s teammates had also been the first shinobi in their family, focused and driven and a bit resentful of Minato’s talents. They had been distant with his students and not been a big feature in Obito’s life. She had assumed they kept away from her on purpose not because they were dead.

“I didn’t know,” She said softly.

“That’s about everyone I would trust with Naruto. There were a lot of offers of fostering him from all the big clans at first, including yours. But Sensei said his sister would be perfect and no one could argue with him. And after she died from poison meant for Naruto, no one offered again. So…” Jiraiya smiled without humour, “Anyone else you can think of, who could be trusted with a three-year-old jinchuuriki whose identity is known throughout the village?”

Obito glared at him, angry that she had no other suggestion. “What about-” she searched her mind for someone else.

“I want to do your hair before I go,” announced Sakuya coming through the kitchen door still putting blush on her cheeks. “Yours was terrible yesterday. And did you know they have waterproof mascara now? I feel like that was meant for you.” She put down her bag loudly. “Are you still here?” she sniffed at Jiraiya.

“…I was just on my way out…” Jiraiya said, making for the door.

“Wait! I’m not finished!” Obito put up a hand to stop him.

“I’ll be in Konoha for a week at least before I leave again. I’ll see you before I go.” Jiraiya promised, dodging her hand. “Thanks for the pills!”
“Great.” Sakuya muttered, brandishing kohl. “I’ll have to arrange extra patrols around every bathhouse and strip joint in Konoha.”

“He wouldn't go to strip joints!”

Sakuya sighed as she applied the eyeliner. “You are just so naive Obito. It’s adorable. And since we’ve had breakfast so early, you and I can have a session of training before work.”

* 

The next day of work was better, if only because Obito knew to brace herself against the endless paperwork she had to work through before she would be given her own tower ID and permission to work in the archives department. She got her Lunch Tokens for the tower cafeteria and celebrated by eating the unhealthiest options for lunch, though a Jonin Obito knew through the re-writing group did make her drink some foul green smoothie and a packet of raw sprouts.

“I crave the weirdest things when I’m on a three-day run back from Wave.” The Jonin explained cheerfully, playing with the beads of his earrings.

“Can’t say I’ve ever craved anything green.” Obito said taking away the taste of the smoothie with deep-fried chicken. “Except maybe matcha dango…”

“That sounds disgusting.” His made-up eyes darted over to the side of the cafeteria table, “Is this yours?” He leaned down and picked up a combination lock.

“That’s weird, I put one just like it on my locker this morning.” Obito took it from him and turned it over. “It even has the same scratches mine has from when I dropped it.”

“..Think you better go check your locker, Obito. Want to take some seeds for later?”

“No. Thank-you.” Obito got up and left quickly, before he insisted on her having some of his awful tasteless seeds. The locker she had been allocated was near the cafeteria, and she hadn’t bothered to set any traps or wards on it yet. She was sure she had put the lock on though.

And she was right. As she entered the room she saw her lock hanging on the door of her open locker, a familiar gloved hand holding it open while a head of soft grey air peered inside.

“Hey!” Exclaimed Obito, and Kakashi started, turning with a kunai from her own locker. She looked down at the lock she had brought from the cafeteria and started herself as it disappeared, as the genjutsu wore off. “What are you doing in my locker? Can’t you just send a note, not use genjutsu and break open my property.”

Kakashi had put the kunai back the moment he registered who she was and looked startled and guilty, eyes darting around the room, “I didn’t- wait, no!” He darted away from the locker, towards Obito and she braced herself for his approach. But he went past her without slowing and she turned to see him hit at the now closed door of the locker room.

“Tatami! Open this door!” Kakashi ordered. Obito relaxed slightly. There was more embarrassment than anger in Kakashi’s tone, telling her they weren’t in danger. Not yet. She moved over to her locker and looked at the tidied locker, much neater than she had left it before lunch. The few weapons in it were cleaned and sharpened, various paperwork she had thrown in randomly was now neatly stacked and, she leaned forward to confirm, labelled with cardboard tabs.

“You broke into my locker to organise it?” she said flatly, turning back to Kakashi, now trying to frantically pick the lock of the only exit door in the room.
“You’ve had it for two days, it shouldn’t be so messy already.” Kakashi told her not looking up from his attempts to pick the lock. “I couldn’t fit the jacket in.”

Obito looked around, and saw her brown jacket, the one she had given to Naruto last night, on a hanger next to her open locker. She reached up, touched one embroidered sleeve, where a green stains ran from elbow to shoulder. That hadn’t been there last night. She took a hesitant sniff and smelled the strong aroma of children’s all-in-one syrup, the awful tasting tonic for slightly ill children. It looked like Naruto had spilled a whole bottle. Obito hoped he had gotten a treat anyway, but she knew it was unlikely.

She reached into a pocket and pulled out the money she had tried to pay Teuchi with, more crumpled and worn that it had been before.

“I wouldn’t have minded if he kept it.” She said, meaning both the jacket and the money.

The sound of metal fiddling stopped and Kakashi sighed. Obito slowly turned back to him, seeing him rise up and slip his lockpick back up his sleeve, turning to lean his back against the still locked door. He gave one final hit of the door with his fist and raised his head to meet Obito’s gaze for a second. “Iwashi got the jacket before it went to I&T for examining. The orphanage isn’t allowed to accept donations anyway.” He looked down at the worn-out floor. “Iwashi wanted me to give it back in person. I thought he was kidding. He’s put glue or something in the lock.”

“I better not get stuck with the cost of replacing the door!” Obito warned raising her voice in case this Iwashi-person was listening outside. “And why does he care, if you give the jacket to me in person or not?”

Kakashi shrugged, still looking at the floor. “Don’t know.” he said unconvincingly.

“Alright, then.” With false casualness Obito walked over to the door. She tried not to be hurt when Kakashi edged away from her as she approached. “Hey Iwashi! Kakashi gave me the jacket, we briefly made eye contact, can I go now?” she called through the keyhole.

A note slid under the door. TALK TO EACH OTHER YOU IDIOTS it dictated up at her.

Obito contemplated the door, trying to work out how much force she would have to put in her fireball jutsu to burn it down. Was the door original Mokuton wood or a weaker replacement wood? If she burnt it fast enough could she catch the interfering asshole on the other side. Then her common sense chimed in. Was she really prepared to burn down part of the tower to avoid talking about her feelings? Wasn’t she slightly more mature than that?

“Fine! But you don’t get to listen in.” She told the door sulkily and went back to her locker. One of her privacy seal was annoyingly easy to find with Kakashi’s new sorting system and she activated it with a minute or so of work.

Then she sat down on the bench in the centre of the small locker room. “Alright, Kakashi. Let’s talk.”
Three years on and Obito was back where she had been when she had first returned to Konoha, her last remaining teammate leaking guilt and unable to look her in the eye. She had thought she had gotten better since then, gained another eye, a full set of teeth and re-trained full motion back into her fingers. The wounds all over her body had healed and the remaining scars had become as soft and painless as they could get. She knew Fuuinjutsu now, enough to be considered a licensed student of Konoha and had duties in the Hokage Tower. Obito was two weeks from turning eighteen, the age of adulthood to Shinobi clans and her family was eager for her to marry and raise children of her own. But right at that moment she felt like an awkward ten-year-old again, trying frantically to say anything to ease the tension in the room.

“I’m not mad at you for this.” Obito said into the widening silence of the room. “I know being locked in a room with me is the last thing you want.” She swallowed. “And even if I were angry, I wouldn’t take it out on you. I’m- I’m trying to be better. At controlling my emotions.”

Obito had ruined everything the day she lost her temper at Kakashi, the day she asked about Naruto. If she had held in her anger for two minutes more she would have understood everything, that Kakashi was forbidden to directly interfere with their sensei’s child and had been traumatized by the events surrounding Naruto’s birth. Gai had told her that Kakashi had been assigned to watch over the pregnant Kushina, had watched her for eight happy months, a small vision of normality and peace after years of death and despair. To have that all end in the loss of his teacher and charge, being forced to watch from behind a barrier while a monster took the last of his family, Obito could understand Kakashi not wanting to ever think of Naruto and all the lost dreams attached to him, law of secrecy or not.

While Obito had stubbornly refused to think of any of the implications and circumstances that would come with Minato having a child. She had mindlessly zeroed on child-of-my-teacher, family, mine; ignoring all the signs pointing to Naruto’s existence being a touchy subject to everyone. If she had just stopped to think, she would have known that Kakashi was not the person to be angry with.

“It’s fine.” Kakashi said dismissively, pulling an orange covered book out of his hip pouch and holding it up, blocking his mismatched eyes from Obito. “Iwashi will have to let us out when someone else needs to get to their locker.”

Obito hit her knuckles to her knees, taking a deep breath at the blatant avoidance. “But I need to apologise for my actions. I want you to understand it wasn’t your fault. I lashed out at you because I was angry, still angry at my family, for their stunt with my prosthetic leg and for being so harsh when I asked about Naruto. I thought you were being like them, not telling me because I wasn’t important enough to be told. Because you liked holding something over me.”

“I wouldn’t—” Kakashi frowned.

“I know you wouldn’t, I know you always have a reason for everything you do. If I had stopped to think for a minute or let you explain, I would have understood.” Obito swallowed. “So, I’m sorry I
lost my temper and hit you… repeatedly. It was unacceptable behaviour and I have no excuse. I will not do it again. Please forgive me.” She bent her head and neck as best she could into a low bow. She didn’t get off the bench onto her knees only because she feared Kakashi wouldn’t help her to her feet afterwards.

“I forgive you, Obito. Please stop apologizing,” Kakashi sighed.

Kakashi had grown again. The hand clenching around his book was big enough to completely obscure the cover of the orange book. His other hand was bandaged at the knuckles, fingers tucked into the top of his side pocket. Obito almost wished he was palming a kunai, ready to defend himself is she turned violent again. But she knew he wasn’t. Even after everything, there was no way Kakashi would defend himself against his single remaining teammate.

Obito unbent and forced herself to say the last piece that needed to be said. “I hope we can still be friends.” Liar! A part of her screamed, but she kept that hidden behind her tightly clenched smile.

“But-” Kakashi closed his book, using a finger to keep his page place. “You know about Danzo’s scheming. And with your family, wouldn’t it be safer-”

“I don’t want safer! I want you… in my life.” Obito quickly added self-consciously. Now she was the one avoiding eye contact, running her eyes along the row of lockers next to the conflicted Kakashi.

The silence dragged on between them. Obito tried to clear her head, hoping it wasn’t obvious her cheeks were hot with embarrassment. You discussed contraceptives with this man. You’ve slept together. She told herself sternly. He’s seen you in a hundred embarrassing situations over the years, why are you blushing now?

There was the sound of Kakashi drawing breath to speak. She panicked and spoke before he could. “So… what’s it like being captain of your own handpicked squad?”

“Classified,” came the automatic reply. Obito sighed, but this response was normal for him.

“I’m not asking for mission details. Just tell me if you’re enjoying the change?”

“In some ways,” Kakashi hedged, taking his other hand out of his pocket to turn the page of his book. “In some ways not.”

“Kakashi, just tell me if your teammates get on together. Do they like each other or fight all the time?”

Kakashi shrugged, “There was some tension at first. Panda is older than Cat and I put together, and her professional pride was hurt by being made my lieutenant. She relaxed after a few missions when she saw we were worthy of our ranks. Ram did threaten to resign when Dog joined us, but he’s accepted the necessity of his presence in ANBU.”

“Why did Dog,” Obito emphasised Tenzo’s codename, “have to join ANBU anyway. He can’t be older than thirteen, shouldn’t he be with his clan getting used to normal life?”

“He doesn’t come from a clan,” Kakashi pointed out.

“But his talents do, that makes him a member of that clan, no matter how he got them,” Obito argued.

Another page turned calmly, “That’s not how it works.”
“That’s exactly how it works. My clan adopts any child that could be one of us or has complimentary talents and no reason not to be an Uchiha. Kaoru was adopted in because of the skill she showed with genjutsu in the academy and I only officially became an Uchiha when my grandfather petitioned for me and grandma to join…” she frowned. “Come to think of it, I haven’t seen a single person wearing a Senju crest since I got back. There are still some around, aren’t there?” Her family sure complained about the clan like it still existed.

Kakashi lowered his book factionally, body language becoming slightly less closed off at the neutral topic. “There are a few Senju living around Konoha, mostly involved in the diplomatic corps and treasury. The few children they do have can’t be risked as a rank and file shinobi.”

“Well that’s fair,” Obito rolled her eyes. Stupid Senju and their stupid complexes. The Uchiha clan heir was a Genin at eight, but heaven forbid the dainty Senju children cut their precious hands on play kunai… “I still think Tenzo should be with them rather than in the shadows with ANBU.”

“Dog has no memory or understanding of life outside of the shadows.” Kakashi said tensely, book coming up again over his face. “He’s still adjusting to normal ANBU life, putting him with an entire family of non-combatants would be cruel.”

“I’m not staying dump him outside the Senju estate and run, I’m just saying maybe they should be aware of each other’s existence…” Obito tried to explain. “It’s like expecting Naruto to cope in the Academy at five after being raised in a civilian orphanage with no side training…”

“The first years of the Academy are a joke, he’ll do fine-“

“Not everyone is a genius Kakashi! Naruto won’t start school with mastery of two fighting styles and already using chakra!” Obito exclaimed, an old bitter memory popping up. Kakashi had been in the lowest year of the Academy for three months before being pushed up a year and then again a month after that. At home Obito had been interrogated relentlessly for information about Sakumo’s motherless whelp. At school Rin and the other girls had cooed and fussed over the little genius. Obito just wished the brat would go away. Then he had graduated before the year was out, leaving an impression on every child in the school that could never be forgotten.

“Naruto’s going to go to school knowing nothing. Not the baby chakra training games, or how shinobi life works. He won’t even know how to hold a kunai without cutting his fingers…” Obito tucked one arm to her chest, hand to her chin. “He won’t know why adults hate him, why he gets mistreated, who his parents were… he-“ She swallowed. “It’s not fair. Everyone deserves to have a family. Naruto and Tenzo.”

“ANBU will protect them both.” Kakashi told her, a hint of irritation in his voice. “I always look out for my comrades, you taught me that. And the squad that lost track of Naruto was reprimanded, a new supervisor has been appointed by the Hokage. Genma’s been after that position for months, he’ll keep a tight watch on the situation.”

“Genma Shiranui is ANBU?” Obito blinked at that. The man was only a handful of years her elder and never struck her as the hard-hearted assassin type. Undercover informant maybe, occasional honeypot spy for sure, but not a baby killer.

“Not exactly, he got pulled from the middle of the ANBU trials for a long-term assignment, his official rank is a point of contention.” Kakashi rolled one shoulder boredly. “But he’s been cycling through Naruto’s watch detail for years and has A-rank clearance. He was on a body guarding team with Iwashi and Raido.”

Obito pointed to the door. “The Iwashi that locked us in here?”
“The same. Iwashi Tatami thinks he’s a master manipulator.”

“But how does he even know we weren’t talking to each other, that implies he knew when we were talking.” Obito frowned. “Is he one of Danzo’s Root agents?”

“Iwashi is the furthest thing from Danzo’s agent. And not ANBU either really. You could say...” Kakashi turned the page of his book. “...he’s more the Fourth’s agent than anything else.”

Obito didn’t flinch at Kakashi avoiding Minato-sensei’s name. Whatever he needed to do to protect himself from feelings, she decided. “Oh?”

“He was one of three shinobi handpicked to be the Hokage’s personal bodyguards, demoted after his death. Apparently they made some solemn vow to watch over the Fourth’s Legacy. They will guard Naruto with their very lives.” Kakashi sounded bored at this act of loyalty.

Obito took a moment for sheer relief to pass over her. Thank all the gods, there were more people who gave a damn about Naruto. Three more people, two of which she knew to be more than halfway sane. Raido and Genma would understand what she was objecting to with Naruto’s upbringing. Now she just need to convince the Hokage, Jiraiya and everyone else in the village. She’d start with convincing Kakashi.

“There’s more to looking after a child than keeping him safe. Naruto will need so much more than bodyguards as he gets older. Do you really think a crowded orphanage, one so understaffed they have to lock toddlers in bathrooms, will be able to raise him to be a shinobi? Or even get him ready for the academy? The Hokage wants him in training by the time he turns six-”

“I was fine-”

“Kakashi!” Obito interrupted loudly, putting up a hand to stop him. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, but nothing about you becoming a Genin at five was fine. Alright? Just because you managed to survive doesn’t mean it’s okay to expect any other five-year-old to cope on his own. This is something I’ve done a lot of thinking about. And one day I’m going to find out who pushed for your early graduation and punch them in the face for you, but I don’t have access to those sorts of records yet.”

Kakashi didn’t seem to know how to react to that declaration. After a moment of dull shocked staring, he brought his book right up to cover his face. Obito hoped she hadn’t hurt his feelings by being so blunt. At least she didn’t bring up the other early graduates after him that were pushed to follow in Kakashi’s example. Almost all of them died or were injured permanently, in the pointless effort to bulk up their families’ egos.

Obito looked around the locker room awkwardly. It felt like hours since lunch started, they’d have to be let out of the room soon. What was Iwashi expecting from forcing the ex-lovers to talk? She had apologized, they had agreed to be friends, they were talking… what more could she do to fix this?

She kicked her foot against the floor. “So...good book?”

“Yes.” More silence. Obito was just considering if she should see if anything in the locker room could be used to force the door open, when Kakashi lowered the book from his face and elaborated his answer. “It’s an early print of the next chapter of the Icha Icha series. Didn’t Jiraiya give you a copy too?”

“Why would Jiraiya give me a porn book? I don’t think he knows girls read books with sex scenes,” Obito rolled her eyes.
“Here’s why.” And wonder of wonders, Kakashi came over and sat down next to her on the bench, leaning across the space between them to offer her the open book. “Look at the dedication.”

Obito took the book, her fingers brushing over his gloved ones and turned it to the title page where a handwritten note said *Dog-brat, at least tell me what you think of this one.*

There was no signature, but Obito didn’t need one. She recognized the handwriting. She carefully shut the book and looked up at the waiting Kakashi, her face perfectly blank.

“I-” she started, then stopped to tap the book with a shaking finger. “He-” she swallowed. “Oh no.”

“Oh yes,” Kakashi looked at her hesitantly, not seeming to understand her reaction.

“Oh NO,” Obito started the squeeze the book with both hands, then stopped as the pages started to crinkle. “I’m doomed. I’m going to be smothered with toads in my sleep, forced to return every seal book he gave me…” She dropped the book on the bench next to her. “My Fuuinjutsu teacher writes bad romance novels. I read sex scenes my teacher wrote! I rewrote them! I made money off of them!” Obito covered her face with her hands. “Jiraiya is going to kill me and then revoke my seal license!”

“Wait… you’re the one behind the illegal printing of the fake Icha Icha?” Kakashi stared at her.

“I- it’s not just me, it’s not illegal and they’re not just fakes…. But,” Obito leaned away from him. “Yes?” she admitted quietly ready for an angry reaction.

Kakashi continued to stare at her, his expression unreadable under his mask. Obito cautiously let herself sit up again when he didn’t have an immediate response to her reveal. His eyes followed her movement passively, as his brain seemed to be occupied with something else. Obito waited a minute or two for a further reaction, then cautiously picked up the book to reread the dedication. Maybe Jiraiya would never find out? Maybe he would but he wouldn’t be mad. Maybe she could become a Fire Monk and claim sanctuary in the Temple just within the East Sector of Konoha?

When Kakashi finally spoke, it was with disbelieve. “In the last six months, you’ve started rewriting the porn books of a S-rank shinobi who just happens to be your Fuuinjutsu master-,”

“He’s not my master,” Obito muttered then shut up at the warning twitch in Kakashi’s original eye.

“ Been kidnapped and got half-way to Iwa before being rescued, got tricked into going to Suna and walked back on your own with a near fatal head wound, angered Danzo and at least one of his Root agents,” Kakashi gestured around the locker room, “Became a topic of debate and gossip with your controversial sewn Fuuinjutsu and finally, you accidently ran into a boy that escaped ANBU surveillance.” He looked at her in exasperation. “Anything else I’ve missed?”

“I was the official messenger for my clan to the Hyuuga on the matter of a potential alliance.” Obito admitted quietly.

Kakashi nodded slowly, and looked down at the floor, hands at clutching the bottom slants of the bench. Obito watched him cautiously.

Then his shoulders started shaking. His hands came up to uncover his mouth from his mask, muffled laughter spilling out. It was quiet laughter, but it shook his entire body. Obito was torn between joining in half-heartedly or scaling up the lockers to get away from the unnatural sound, as Kakashi’s laughter got louder and louder.

*I’ve finally broken him,* she thought guiltily. *I wonder what his bounty price is these days…*
There there?” she tried, patting him hesitantly on the back. “It’s not that funny, really.”

Kakashi pressed his bandaged hand hard over his mouth, turning to look at her with wide, stricken eyes. He still shook with restrained sound.

“Just breathe,” Obito said soothingly, rubbing his back in circles. “Slow breaths in and out. In and out. It’s all okay, everything’s going to be okay.” Tentatively she leaned her head against his, trying to remain calm. She knew this was a breakdown of some kind, but she was at a loss as how to fix it. “Breathe in and breathe out,” she said to both herself and to Kakashi.

Kakashi tried to say something but it was too muffled by his hand. There were tears in his eyes but he wasn’t sobbing. Just shaking with muffled chuckles. Obito could deal with that. It took a long couple of minutes before Kakashi’s breathing finally evened out. Obito’s hand slowed down until it just rested on the small of his back, still leaning against him.

Kakashi uncovered his mouth and gave a deep sigh, pulling away to turn and look at her. “You are never going to stay out of trouble, are you?” He said to her wistfully.

“I try-“

“It’s not your fault, it’s just the way you are. You could never pass a situation without sticking your nose into it when we were kids, why did I expect you to manage now?”

“Hey!” Obito crossed her arms and frowned at him. “I can too mind my own business!”

“You know half my team by name. My anonymous, A-rank secret team. I’ve been avoiding you for months and you still worm yourself into my business.”

“I do not worm!”

“You’ve made two treasonous statements in the short time we’ve been locked in here.”

“No one really cares what I say or do! I’m not that important”

Kakashi looked around the room, seeming upset at her words. He reached out to her, then stopped. Obito nodded at him, trying to get him to relax.

Kakashi waved his hand at her agitatedly. “Sure, you’re not important Obito, and Jiraiya isn’t Naruto’s g-.” He clamped his mouth shut abruptly, looking sticken again.

Obito looked at him with suspicion and concern. “What were you going to say? Jiraiya isn’t Naruto’s- genjutsu teacher, guidance counselor, guardian?” She asked with hollow calmness. “I spoke to him this morning on this very subject and he was adamant there was no one left who could be responsible for Naruto. Jiraiya said he had important duties and he had to leave Konoha!”

“Yes, that’s true,” Kakashi said softly. His body language was back to being one of guilt and caution.

Obito stared at him, feeling her body tense with anger. She breathed through her nose and forced herself to relax. Getting angry with Kakashi when he was trying to tell her something would not help. She knew that, she had just promised not to do so again.

“Jiraiya is Naruto’s guardian. He did have a choice. And he chose to leave Naruto in the Hokage’s care.” she clarified.
Kakashi gave the subtlest of nods.

Obito felt a wave of anger wash over her. That perverted layabout had looked Obito in the eye and said there was no one left who could look after Naruto. But he was the one with the responsibility-

She calmly stood up off the bench, closed and locked her locker then turned back to face her silent ex-teammate. She smiled. “I’m glad we had this talk. We must get together like this again soon, outside of a locked locker room, but I have to go work out how to castrate a Toad Summoner now. So… bye?”

Obito walked past Kakashi and up to the locked door, removed her privacy seal and put her hand to the keyhole and channelled her chakra into the metal. A minute or two of fire chakra should disintegrate whatever was stuck in the lock and get the door open. She let out a small pulse of killing intent in case Iwashi was nearby the door and needed a warning to run. She didn’t want to hurt anyone when she flung the door open and stormed away.

“Obito?” There was a hand over hers on the keyhole. Kakashi had quietly crept up on her, was standing just behind, carefully not touching her anywhere but on her hand. Again, it stuck her how much taller than her Kakashi was now, looming over her average height.

“I can do this. I don’t need help.” she said tersely, as his chakra joined hers in flowing through the metal. Tiny sparks started to emerge from the dark recess of the keyhole.

“I like helping you.” Together their chakra made short work of whatever was keeping the door locked and when Obito moved her hand away from Kakashi’s to turn the door handle, it turned easily and opened an inch. Then Kakashi pushed it closed again.

“Hey!” Obito turned the door handle again but froze when Kakashi put his other arm loosely around her waist.

“You’re really incapable of staying out of trouble, aren’t you?” he asked quietly, resting his cheek down on the back of her head. “If you’re not threatening Academy officials or village elders, you’re interfering with other clans or rallying random villagers to carry out your mad schemes.” he sounded resigned, as if he had made of a difficult decision.

Obito wanted to argue against the accusation but all her brain was focusing on was the feel of his arms and breath against her neck.

“Someone needs to keep a close eye on you.” a soft whisper came.

Yes, her brain finally managed to decide on. This is good, very good. Say yes.

She opened her mouth. “Isn’t that a line from Jiraiya's book?” she asked instead. No, her brain screamed. Bad, very bad. Why?

Kakashi pressed his face into the curve of her neck and shoulder. Shudders of breath puffed onto her collarbone. Obito couldn’t tell if he was sighing or laughing again.

“Sorry?” she said hesitantly

Kakashi lifted his face, kissed her on the cheek and moved to open the door himself. “Don’t tell anyone about Jiraiya until I talk to you again soon, okay Obito? No castration attempts until you run the plan by me.” He pulled his mask back into place and climbed out of the nearest window, pausing for a moment to look back at her. “You know far too many S-rank secrets not to be important.”
Obito put a hand to her cheek. Okay? That was a totally normal way to say goodbye to a friend. Right? Right?

Her heart gave a particularly strong beat.

*Oh, shut up you.*

The rest of the day passed peacefully and the day after that too. Obito got a couple of tips from her family on how to go about castrating someone without having to actually touch their junk. Shearing clippers seemed to be the best option and Obito took to sharpening Kamo’s disused gardening shears in case she got into a friendly discussion with Jiraiya over things like copyright laws and child welfare…

Other than that, her days were spent at the tower searching the giant bookcases for the Nidaime’s Fuuinjutsu notes on Konoha’s plumbing system. It would be weeks before Obito would be needed to remove and replace Tobirama Senju’s work on the new pipes for the village. In the meantime, she would have to work out how to replicate his seal work. The notes she would need were scattered among the thousands of pages of random writing, roughly ordered in the date Tobirama started working in them. Roughly ordered, not because the research department were anything other than meticulous in dating and organising the work, but because Tobirama seemed to have had at least three separate notebooks he worked in at any one time, randomly switching between them.

Tobirama’s notetaking was much brisker than Kushina’s, less flowery and whimsical than Jiraiya’s and even more tightly worked than Minato’s. Obito ached to resort to her Sharingan to read his writing, though she didn’t want to end up memorising any more of his work than she had to. The jerk had written his work lightly with a thin brush, as if to save on ink and space. If not for the fact that the notebooks were all parchment made from mokuton trees, the ink would have faded by now.

The skill behind the minuscule writing was impressive though, Obito had to admit. The notebooks veered off randomly, from project to project to random observation or mission report. There were snippets of poetry, overhead conversation copied down as the mood struck him, rough sketches of land and weapons. The collection started during the clan war times, when Tobirama practised his writing by copying down the nursery rhythms his mother sang to his little brothers, all the way through to the founding of Konoha and beyond, only to end abruptly a week before the first great war started.

In the earliest notebooks there was a disturbing sketch of a dissected Sharingan, surrounded by guesses over how it worked and why some Uchiha had it and others did not. Obito had physically recoiled from that image and had to cover it with paper while she read the notes underneath it. Tobirama had been convinced the Sharingan was activated by the sight of enemy blood, while other theories were that moonlight brought the red out. The Senju also believed the Uchiha were hermaphrodite monsters who took the form of whichever gender suited them, which to be fair, was kind of true. There was a mad rant a few pages later about Uchiha taking each other’s eyes and gaining new unique abilities with them. That was obviously just speculation from Uchiha always taking the eyes of their fallen family to protect them, but it was a disturbing reminder of the dark history the Senju shared with the Uchiha.

The notebooks from Konoha’s founding onwards were more elegant and diverse, covering a whole range of topics. Sealing was a late addition to Tobirama’s studies and rarely got his complete attention as he tried to make his brother’s dreams a reality. Obito found the notes on his water purification system next to a rough sketch of the Hokage monument staircase system and plans for hideaway holes hidden in his brother’s nose.
The seal for keeping the pipes watertight and tamperproof were scrunched up next to a potential academy curriculum. Someone else’s handwriting kept adding kunoichi training and civilian orientation to the list and getting crossed off by Tobirama.

And above a rant about the Daimyo refusing funding, Obito found the seal for breaking down sewage waste and diverting them to various pipeworks. Obito particularly liked the sketch of the Daimyo’s court getting drenched by the diverted sewage waste.

“Okay,” Obito gave the book back to Abe Maruboshi and waited for him to close and lock the bookcase. Then she walked to the doorway and unlocked and opened it to the bored looking Genin she had hired for the day. “Now go look up the topics of irrigation, compost and recycled water.” She handed him the permission slip he would need to access the catalogue system, the topics she wanted written down and her signature with the date. The boy would have to memorize which notebooks the subjects were in and return to tell Obito.

“Why don’t you look up something cool,” the white-haired boy demanded, getting up from the floor he was lying on. “Like the Nidaime’s water dragon jutsu.”

“Oh yes, that would be a great thing for sewage water to do. Great use of chakra and energy.” Obito rolled her eyes. “Mizuki, if it’s remotely cool and exciting, assume I’m not allowed to look it up.”

“This sucks.” Mizuki muttered, “I should have just gone on that courier mission with Iruka…”

“At least you have the option of a different assignment tomorrow. I’m stuck here.”

“Who’d you tick off?”

“Everyone.” Obito grinned at him as he walked away. “If you get back here fast enough I’ll be able to go to lunch and get an extra helping of dessert for you.”

* After lunch Obito was sent off in search of the only other tailor with any affiliation to the Hokage Tower, a venerable kimono maker who had the honour of being the sole creator of all four Hokage robes. Apparently someone in the Fuuinjutsu organisation had decided she was the only one who could look over Obito’s suggested price list for the sewn seals she would be selling on the side of her assigned Tower duties.

“Fuuinjutsu with sewing,” the old goblin of a woman muttered, using a magnifying glass to examine Obito’s work sample. “We’d never do anything this frivolous in the good old days.” Her large hair bun bobbed wildly, as she bent closely to examine stitches.

Obito refrained from mentioning any of the gory details she had read in Tobirama’s notebooks from the good old days of genocide and clan warfare and looked around the lady’s workshop with interest. A dozen or so meek looking workers poured over long lengths of fabric, measuring and folding and pinning. Kimonos, shirts and lengths of silk in a thousand shades and patterns hung from the ceiling, old fashioned patterns so long they almost reached the floor and scandalously new simple ones.

Lady Kukabu sniffed and stuffed her magnifying glass in her sleeve. “This price list is a joke, I’ve seen county bumkins charge more for their work in illegal roadside stalls.”

“But low prices mean more custom. I need to start earning money fast-“

“But if you have such low prices everyone will assume the work is only worth as much!” she
snapped. “If you devalue your work, so will everyone else. Have a bit of pride in your own abilities.”

Obito sighed. “Yes ma’am.” She shifted on the weird side cushion she had been offered as a seat, leaning her weight off her bad knee.

Lady Kukabu shook Obito’s work at her, standing a bare handspan higher than Obito’s head. “And why are you using this cotton on these samples, when anyone can tell they won’t last a month under the strain of movement and washing?”

Obito flinched guilty; she had hoped nobody would notice that. Naomi’s in-laws were still waiting for her to pay them back for the horse she had borrowed from them and she didn’t want to bother them for more silk thread before she paid them back. “My silk stores ran out, I’ll get more when my tower salary starts next month-“

“How can’t your family pay? Don’t the Uchiha care about your efforts?” Lady Kukabu demanded.

“Yes, they do. But they already pay for everything else, I don’t want to bother them-“

Lady Kukabu stared down at her for a while. She tapped at one of Obito’s less impressive seal inventions, without looking away from Obito’s face. “Show me your hands.”

Obito put out her hands, ink stains around her new pen holding calluses. There were various cuts and pin picks of various ages and sizes on her fingers, along with the old scars from the cave-in. Only her nails were particularly neat, cut short and filed smooth to keep from catching on fabric.

Lady Kukabu put down the sewing sample and took Obito’s hands in her own, which were just as work worn. “You are Akena’s grandchild, aren’t you? You have her hands. I heard you died in the war.” She turned the hands to see Obito’s palms.

“I was captured and made a prisoner of war. I only returned a year after the war ended.” Obito shifted awkwardly as the old tailor traced the ugly pockmark where a rock had crushed almost completely through her finger bones.

“Your grandmother was the fastest sewer I ever had to supervise. I would storm over to her workspace, convinced she had done nothing but talk, only to find she had finished her own work and was laughing as she helped her neighbours finish theirs.” She frowned. “I didn’t like her attitude, but I could never find fault with her work.”

Obito couldn’t say anything to that and just waited to get her hands released from the small serious woman.

“Go across to the laundry room and see if you can help them finish the linen for the Education Minister’s banquet. If I get a good report of your work, you can take some of our own silk threads for your work.”

“Thank-you ma’am!” Obito tried to take back her hands but the old woman held them fast, thumbing over the palm of her right hand.

“Shuriken calluses, ink stains and needle indentions on your fingertips. You’re a strange one, I’ll grant you. I will give you the corrected price list for your work once I’ve tested the seals myself.” She finally let go of Obito’s hands.

*
Obito learnt to iron that day, a household skill her former shinobi career had allowed her to avoid until now. She also learnt that working in a swelteringly hot room filled with boiling cauldrons and wet clothing hung everywhere was incredibly unpleasant. No new-fangled washing machines and dryers here, only sweating workers huffing over steaming pots of water, dye and cloth, wielding copper poles thicker and heavier than most staff weapons Obito had seen used in battle. Steam and chemicals hung in the air, causing everyone to cover their faces as best they could with scarfs and rags.

Her fire natured chakra and tolerance against heat meant she had little fear of being burnt by the metal iron she pressed over dyed fabric, but it was still hard work, bending over again and again and maintaining the heat of the coal within the iron with her chakra.

“You okay?” one of the other workers asked as she carried another bag of limestone to her bubbling caldron.

“I’ll live.” Obito told her without looking away as she smoothed out the side of a bright blue length of fabric. “The heat actually feels good on my joints and I have been meaning to give my stomach some exercise.” She leaned further forward to reach the top edge. “And I don’t have to think too hard.” Her brain still ached from her notetaking, and from firmly shoving away thoughts of Jiraiya and betrayal from her mind while at work. She couldn’t let anyone know the two new pieces of information she had about the Toad Summoner. Kakashi could be traced as the leak and be put at risk. She still hadn’t settled on a course of action, as her anger simmered down to cold rage and the realities of the situation occurred to her. Obito had to be smart about how she used the information. For Naruto, and for Minato and Kushina.

“Glad someone here is enjoying themselves.” The laundry woman muttered, more to herself than Obito as she leaned over to look closer at Obito’s ironing. “That colour’s still wrong though, got a bad batch of dye and it messed up the order for the Yamanaka.” She huffed and went back to her boiling caldron of fabric.

“I like it.” Obito said to herself as she put the iron down to fold the fabric neatly. “It a strong kind of light blue, like the sky between storm clouds.” She set it down and took up the next fabric.

* 

The silk thread Obito was given were the odds and ends of the storeroom, along with random piles of fabric Lady Kukabu wanted to get rid of. Obito didn’t care, she had enough storage seals to take everything offered and sort through it later. The thread was the good quality stuff, continuous silk lines that worked better for Fuuinjutsu than cotton or wool. That was more than worth being handed lengths of lime green cloth no one would ever want, along with badly dyed kimono failures.

Bolstered by her unexpected bounty Obito made herself go across to Hospital floor of the tower, for a chore she had been putting off. Her shoulder was not getting better. It had stopped healing from the damage done during the Suna mission and she needed to do something about it. Mariko would want her to try.

But going to the hospital floor was a mistake. Since Hinata Hyuuga’s attempted kidnapping the entire Hyuuga clan had been holed up in their estate, unable to carry out any of their duties, and since many Hyuuga worked in the medical field, the waiting rooms were crowded with injured shinobi hoping to see one of the overworked medics sometime that day.

Obito ended up giving up after three hours of waiting to make an appointment. She was used to pain, the little Genin vomiting into his Jounin-sensei’s lap needed help more. She fussed over the green faced Idate while his teacher went to wash off his clothing, and then left the loud waiting room.
She’d work out something else for her shoulder.

“I got these four years ago when I had Iroaka,” Izanami said digging in the very back of her bedroom cupboard. “They should still work as painkillers, they were so strong I slept through his crying at night. Poor Tekka had to bring him to me for night nursing.”

Obito considered the old bottle sceptically. It had sticky residue from it’s label and dust on it’s cork lid. “I think this is a bad idea.”

“Nonsense.” Her Aunt put her cupboard back into order, “You said the herbs Daiki gave you aren’t working. We need you in pristine condition for your upcoming birthday!”

“I suppose so…” Obito poured one large pill into her hand, eyed it and swallowed it dry. If she didn’t have any side effects she’d take a larger dose with the muscle pills the next morning.

“I’m surprised you need painkillers again after so long.” Izanami remarked as she finished folding her clothing. “You haven’t used them in almost a year now. Have they been making you work too hard in the Tower?”

Obito looked away, focusing on the crowded vanity of jewelry and make-up, most of which Obito had never seen her aunt wear. “I think I’m just getting used to full time work.” She said. No one needed to know about Kakashi’s gift of ANBU grade painkillers or her mission to Suna that messed up her shoulder again. “And I haven’t had a physical therapy session with Mariko in ages.”

“Yes,” Izanami shut her cupboard and turned to look Obito in the eye. “That whole Hyuuga situation is beginning to be very inconvenient.”

“Inconvenient? Auntie they’re hiding in their home because they’re scared they’ll be punished for killing a kidnapper.” Obito exclaimed. “You have five children and Iroaka is only a little bit older than Hinata, I thought you’d be sympathetic.”

Izanami sighed and reached out to straighten Obito’s collar. “Sweetheart, the Uchiha have always had to deal with the danger of kidnappers. We don’t host diplomats or even non-clan members under our roofs because the Hokage knows we’d kill anyone who tried to hurt our children, even if he was the Daimyo himself. The Hyuuga have our offer of alliance to help them get their revenge. If they don’t want to take it then they need to go back to normal life and hope the village will protect them.”

Obito stared at her soft, motherly aunt. “That’s not- I…. No,” she spluttered, trying to verbalise her disagreement with Izanami’s opinion. “We can’t expect the Hyuuga to choose between revenge or passive acceptance. There has to be another option. I thought that was why we offered the alliance, to give them more power to negotiate with Kumo.”

“Oh sweetheart,” Izanami patted her scared cheek. “Don’t worry your pretty head with the matter. It’s very complicated. You’ll have a husband to understand it all for you one day.”

Obito opened her mouth, but she really didn’t have any idea how to start arguing with that statement. Even if she did make a suitable match, she’d like to think she’d always try to understand and think for herself.

“Now,” Izanami took Obito’s arm and led her own of the bedroom back to the kitchen. “Let’s talk about other things. Sakuya told me your Fuuinjutsu teacher showed up a few days ago, he must be in Konoha for something important.”
“Or he’s just here to perve at the public baths and make women uncomfortable.” Obito said grudgingly. Once her rage simmered down all the feelings for Jiraiya she had left were bitterness and loss. She had trusted Jiraiya utterly, ignored his many flaws in favour of his cheerful personality and few moments of real emotions. Knowing he had lied into her face and abandoned Naruto to the Hokage’s mercy, made her look back and re-examine her past encounters with him.

“Auntie, how much do you know about Jiraiya?” Obito asked hesitantly as she washed vegetables. “Why does everyone let him act the way he does, with the bathhouse spying and drinking?”

“Who is going to tell a Sannin how to act?” Izanami answered easily, getting out her knives and chopping board. “That boy was an orphan from birth, no clan to lay claim to. I suppose when he was young no one though he was worth being taught any better and when he became the student of the Hokage there was no time to bother with things unrelated to war.” Izanami frowned as she started to chop the vegetables. “There was always a war on or threatening to begin during the first decade of Sarutobi’s reign. He had very little time to dedicate to his young team.” Izanami chopped faster as she talked, “Not that they made much difference to the war until near the end, when they claimed they ended the war with a single battle.”

Izanami stopped chopping and took a deep calming breath. She looked at Obito and smiled thinly. “When the Third’s students came home they were like young gods to the village and not even fully grown. No one was going to complain about one of them being just a bit too rude and touchy with girls. We just all ignored it until it was too late to do anything. These days the Hokage can barely keep him in the village and no one is going to say anything that could lead to out last loyal Sannin leaving the village completely.” Izanami changed the grip on her knife to a hold better suited to a stabbing motion. “That being said, I will be the first one in line to hurt him if Jiraiya has finally crossed the line and done something to you.”

“What?” Obito came back from her imaginings of three young Sannin, still unbroken and loyal. “Oh, no he hasn’t done anything to me. I’ve just realised how unpleasant he really is.”

“Good for you,” Izanami relaxed and went back to her chopping. “It’s always hard to acknowledge flaws in people we care about. Like how Hazuki refused to believe her brother Yashiro deserved that telling off you gave him.”

Obito blinked at that. Was it truly the same thing? Did Jiraiya make people feel like Yashiro Uchiha made her feel; on edge and helpless, watching for him any signs of aggression or playful touching, braced to react from the moment she saw him?

Obito had never been unaware of Jiraiya’s flaws exactly. He had never done much to hide how he viewed woman. At his first meeting with Minato’s team of Genin he had told Rin he looked forward to seeing her when she turned eighteen, since she was so cute then at ten. Minato had shoved him into one of the trap demonstrations he had been using, and lead his team away from Jiraiya’s pained cries. Kushina had showed up later that day and took Rin aside for some girl talk while Minato blushed his way through a stuttering talk about consent and bad touching and how no meant no, which had flown over both Obito and Kakashi’s heads. Obito had gotten the Uchiha clan sex talk years before, but it had been much more direct and understandable. If an adult made you uncomfortable, and you weren’t in a dangerous situation then a-kick-to-the-shines-and-report-to-an-Uchiha-grown-up was the correct response. Obito had a terrible suspicion that Kakashi’s only other sex ed had been what he read in Rin’s medical textbooks.

But Jiraiya had still been allowed to come into contact with Team 7, even been allowed to supervise their training when Minato had been busy. Obito had not minded much that Rin shied away from their teacher’s teacher and stayed close to her teammates’ sides. Jiraiya had always been all big talk
with women and no action, Obito had thought.

“It’s alright,” Izanami assured her, misinterpreting her long silence. “We’ll make peace with that side of the family when they come to your birthday party next month. We’ll seat them near the main table.”

“The main table?” Obito swallowed, “Auntie, I thought we could just have a small gathering like last year.”

“But you’re turning eighteen! We need to show off that you’re a grown woman. A grown unmarried woman!” Out from a shelf came a bursting full file that Obito flinched away from. The first page had the clan register, every unmarried person’s name underlined.

“Auntie.” Obito took a deep breath and closed the file. “I love you. But no. No way.”

The argument that followed was gruesome and heart wrenching. Obito’s long dead mother’s name was invoked, along with the years Izanami had given to raising her ungrateful orphaned child. In response Obito pointed out the hours of unpaid babysitting she had done for Izanami and the purposeful lack of warning about the party size. Izanami ranted about clan responsibilities and the joy of adulthood and marriage. Obito howled her refusal to breed just because it was expected of her. Izanami called her an ungrateful spoiled brat, Obito called her a manipulative control freak.

Obito stormed out of the house, dire threats of disownment ringing in her ears. Kamo had no idea who the young woman with his sister’s face was, or why she was crying on his shoulder, but he patted her hair all the same.

*

No Tower work was scheduled for her the next day, but Obito refused to remain home when she knew Izanami was plotting ways to get Obito to agree to the party.

“I’m sorry but I don’t see the problem,” Kyoko admitted as she set up her desk for another day of paperwork.

Obito, both hands clutched tightly around a cup of coffee, looked up at her with bloodshot eyes. “It’s not my birthday party, it’s my aunt’s party. Because her daughter refused to let her throw her a coming of age party for her years ago, I’m the substitute. She can’t wait any longer and besides, it’s an excuse for her to send a message to the clan that I’m eighteen and need to be married off.”

“I thought you said they’ve been wanting you to get married since you turned fifteen?” Kyoko asked with innocent curiosity.

“Yes.” Obito slurped her cold coffee. “But now they’re getting serious about it. They’re changing Mission Get-Obito-Breeding from lowkey B-rank to over-the-top S-rank.”

“S-rank is supposed to be secret,” Kyoko told her absentmindedly, reaching into a crowded file to pull out official paperwork. “Like the identity of Icha Icha’s writer. Is that what you wanted me to find out when you asked me to look for your apprenticeship papers in Jiraiya’s file?” She showed Obito the document formalising Obito Uchiha as Jiraiya of Myoboku’s Fuuinjutsu apprentice. It was dated from two years ago.

“I can’t believe him. He denied I was his formal apprentice from the start! What is his game?” Obito snatched at the paper but Kyoko dodged her hand easily. “Did you find out anything else?”

“Any information not pertaining to you directly is classified. I do have an oath of loyalty to uphold.”
Kyoko told her calmly, patting the metal token that denoted her rank in the Tower hierarchy. “I wouldn’t have mentioned his authorship to you at all if I had found that information in his file. I worked it out, like you must have, from seeing the handwriting on your apprentice papers are the same as the handwritten dedications in Icha Icha.”

“Yes, that was totally my goal.” Obito said absentmindedly taking another sip of her coffee. “Anything else you can tell me, maybe about any responsibilities of his that I should know about, since he’s away so much and I am his official apprentice.” She smiled innocently.

Kyoko gave her direct stare and raised one eyebrow. “You did hear me say I can’t tell you anything that doesn’t directly affect you, didn’t you? I’d think that as someone whose own official file got interfered with so much that it needed to be upgraded to Tower security, you’d respect privacy rules.”

Obito looked away guiltily. “Yes Kyoko, I’m sorry.” She took a long drink of her coffee until she felt brave enough to look at Kyoko again.

“Don’t let it happen again,” Kyoko said stiffly. “I take my duties just as seriously as you. I would never,” she lowered her voice and leaned forward, covering her lips with Obito’s document, “confirm I saw documents proving Naruto Uzumaki is his godson. Never.” she raised her voice again, sitting back normally. “I think you’ve been drinking too much coffee.”

“But-” Obito’s one eye twitching was the only outward reaction to Kyoko’s discovery, “I only had this and another cup with the budgeting department.”

Kyoko blinked, “Why did you have coffee with the budget group?”

“I finished their order for a hundred deflection seals. Apparently they like the idea of not overspending on training ground upkeep this year.” Obito shrugged jerkily. “I couldn’t sleep last night so I sewed. Better than dreaming about being wrapped in kimono made of cow skin and auctioned off.” Although now all thoughts of her clan had flown from her mind. That white haired bastard was Naruto’s godfather. Her mind screeched profanities behind her blank face.

“What are your plans for today?” Kyoko put away the documents out, keeping a wary eye on her. “You can’t work on valuable texts with your hands shaking like that.”

Obito shrugged her working shoulder. “I have a lot of theories and notes on the pipe seals. I need to start testing them out. Any idea where I can find clay?”

* 

The usual training field assigned to Team 7 had been by a wide bridge over a slow running river. It had been useful for Obito’s fire jutsu fine tuning, Kakashi’s chakra building, water walking and Rin’s growing repertoire of Uzushio water jutsu.

The Kyuubi attack had caused the bridge to wash away, replaced by a single plank. The river was now narrower and deeper. There was an abundance of mud on display at the sides, wide enough for a grown woman to comfortably squat next to the flowing water and use the mud for Fuuinjutsu experiments. That was where Jiraiya found Obito, kneeling in river mud, scratching out symbols into her drying mud creations.

“What are you doing?” He asked, peering down at her from the grass bank of the river. A familiar toad sat on his shoulder, looking smug. Obito had spotted it a while ago but had hoped it was just a normal amphibian, not a spy summon. She wasn’t ready to confront Jiraiya about how he had broken
his word and lied to her face.

Obito scowled to herself before blowing a small fireball jutsu onto her work, drying them into flaky, mismatched bowls. The mud wasn’t anything like proper clay, but it was a good start for her experiments. She ignored her teacher and activated her seals with a touch of her chakra. Two bowls exploded and another one dissolved back into wet mud. The rest remained unchanged. Obito nodded and turned to cup up some river water and carefully pour some into each of the remaining bowls. If they remained unchanged then she finally had the watertight seal mastered.

“Aren’t you too old to be playing in the mud?” Jiraiya cheerfully called as he jumped down onto the top of the flowing river behind her.

“Aren’t you too old to be drinking so early?” Obito shot back as the smell of sake hit her. The first bowl began to break apart as soon as water touched it, as did the second. The third, and then finally the fifth one, remained solid.

“If I’m old you should speak to me with more manners,” Obito could hear the grin in Jiraiya's voice. “I know your teacher taught you to respect your superiors.”

Obito’s hands jerked and she spilled all the water before she could reach the other bowls. She looked down at her pathetic attempts to master the Nidaime’s work and hissed through her teeth, resisting the urge to just smash all the bowls back into mud.

“Minato-sensei did teach me to respect all people,” she agreed softly. “But you have taught me to respect nothing but my own wants and desires.” She narrowed her eyes, still glaring down at the mud. “Forget social convention, forget respect, forget basic decency. Nothing matters except what you feel like doing…”

Obito heard the slapping of Jiraiya walking off the top of the river and into the mud bank with her. He peered down at her with a frown. “I don’t know what you’re getting hysterical about, we shinobi have different rules to the rest of the wo-“

“We’re supposed to respect each other Jiraiya!” Obito yelled, turning to frown up at him. “Speak truth to our own teachers, students and teammates! When we give our word to someone we care for, it should count for something!” Obito sneered, feeling the scars on her cheek pull. “But I suppose that’s the problem right there. You’ve never loved anyone but yourself. Not really.”

There was a moment of stillness, as the Toad Summon stared down at the mud splattered woman, caught completely off guard. Obito glared up at his gaping face and refused to feel fear at insulting one of the strongest shinobi in the land. This was the man that abandoned his responsibilities, that left his baby godson to the neglect of the village while he ran around writing bad erotica books. Obito had a right to be angry at him.

“You-“ Jiraiya shook his wide shoulders cutting off his coldly spoken word. “I will not be spoke to this way-“ He started to walk away from Obito.

“That’s right! Walk away when things get emotional, when things get tough. Run off and write stupid fantasies about how you wish the world was, instead of facing how it really is!” Obito threw a clump of mud at his stiff back, too angry to aim well enough to hit him. “Your promises are meaningless.”

Jiraiya stopped walking away and whirled around, fury in his face. “Be grateful I don’t hit bitter little brats!”
“No, you just abandon them!” Obito shot back, rising up on her knees to face him.

Jiraiya’s face went white, his face drained of blood so quickly. “How do you kn- who told you?”

“It doesn’t matter. You looked me in the eye and you lied about Naruto. You said there was no one else who could look after him, when you were his fucking godfather!” Obito howled. “He’s your responsibility! Your charge! You made promises to the dead that you utterly failed to keep!”

“Oh, come on!” Jiraiya threw his hands out at her. “I never thought both of them would die within hours of him being born! The village was in chaos and he was a little screaming lump! What was I supposed to do? Take him with me in my arms, through a land crawling with enemies? Refuse my sensei’s mission, to stay home and,” He waved his hands wildly, showing his lack of understanding, “I don’t know, burp him? Change his diapers? There are other people who can do that. I had a responsibility to my village!”

Obito glared at him, hating the validity of his words, hating herself for not having the ability to rise and walk through the mud to strike him. “Fine.” she spat out. “Maybe it was better you served as a shinobi, in the wake of the chaos. You waited until Sarutobi told you what the arrangements for Naruto would be, didn’t you? Met his sister and made sure she understood there was a high ranking person who cared what happened to him. You did do that much?” She demanded.

“You weren’t there. You have no idea, the chaos, the loss of life!” Jiraiya tried to explain. “It wasn’t all calm after the Kyuubi was sealed away. People were panicking, they didn’t know what had happened, what the Kyuubi was or where it had come from. All they knew was that their perfect, flawless Hokage had died getting rid of it. Rumours spread like the fires the fox had set. I had to contain the information before it did more damage in the capital city!”

“Rumours are still being spread, Jiraiya! Do you know how I found out about Naruto? I saw him, all dirty and crying because he didn’t get sweets like the other orphans. Then my ten-year-old cousin told me he was a bad boy and we had to stay away.” Obito hit her hands against her knees and willed herself not to cry or scream endless curses. “I ran into him wondering the streets after dark, having eaten poison berries to fill his empty stomach. People ignored a lost three-year-old because they feared him. Because he has no one to care for him, no one to defend him.”

“He has guards!”

“You were an orphan too! You know what kind of life he’s living right now! Thinking he has no one that loves him, that cares about his welfare. He’s not a baby anymore Jiraiya, he’s not even a toddler. Why can’t you care for him now?”

“No!” Jiraiya said, loudly with alarm. “I can’t! … I just… can’t.”

There was a quiet pause as the tall Shinobi in the prime of his career and life stared at the scared woman in the cusp of true adulthood. Both were shocked at his blunt refusal.

Obito recovered first, swallowing to be rid of the lump in her throat. “You are Naruto’s godfather, Jiraiya. You made a promise to your student, to your Hokage, that you would care for his son in his absence.” Her dry eyes stared him down as she spoke softly. “Now I know, now all of Konoha knows- your words mean nothing, your promises are worthless. Heh,” she smiled even as her Sharingan activated, simmering rage slowly bringing red and spinning black to her eyes. “A shinobi that abandons his mission is trash, and a shinobi that abandons their comrades is worth less than trash. So, what does that make you, for abandoning a boy you swore to look after.”

Jiraiya’s face was ashen. “You don’t understand. There are reasons, good ones, for why I can’t do
anything for him. The situation is fine right now. Naruto is fine for now. I was an orphan,” He hit his chest roughly, “I survived.”

Obito sank down again, legs squelching in the mud. “Survived? Is that all you want for Minato’s son? Would Kushina be satisfied with that? Is that all you did Jiraiya, survive your childhood?” She sniffed. “I really admired you, I thought you were like me: someone who didn’t really fit in like they should, but still did their best. Someone who meant well and aimed high. I wanted to be like you some day: the dead last who became the equal of his genius teammates.” Obito sniffed again, tears rolling down her cheeks. “But I don’t want you near me now. Just leave me alone, like you do with everyone!”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Konoha and life in general ticks along with no notice taken to Obito's shorting temper with her family, her achievements with fuinjutsu or personal resolutions in her personal life.

Chapter Notes

Finally! Sorry this took so long. My Dad had major surgery last month and I just could not focus on anything. Very excited for the next couple of chapters, the plot finally starts moving to what I had planned it to be when I started this monster fic.

Betaed by the longsuffering Yulia Leafhill

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was quiet after Obito’s demand that Jiraiya leave. Quiet except for the river flowing behind Jiraiya, as he stood there looking angry and lost. Quiet except for Obito’s hard breathing that gradually evened out as her tears stopped. They regarded each other for a long time as if unable to believe that their conversation was really over.

Angrily Obito turned and bent back over her work and gathered up her mud creations, sticking the only two solid ones into her shirt pockets. She was done trying to master Tobirama Senju’s work. She felt too much anger to let her concentrate on the complex fuuinjutsu any further that day.

“I do not leave everyone,” Jiraiya finally said as Obito formed chakra strings in both hands and threw the ends of them up onto the grassy bank above the river mud. They went over a low hanging tree branch and fell back to her again. Obito used them to pull herself up out of the mud to stand. A flare of chakra to the seals in her clothing made the mud fall off her clothing easily, leaving them clean and unmarked. “I have never abandoned Konoha.”

“Whatever you want to tell yourself,” Obito said without looking at him. “I’m done listening to your excuses and being your apprentice;” She carefully arranged the chakra strings around herself, supporting her bad leg, shoulder and arm, “I’ll return to you all the seal books you gave me but I’m keeping the Uzushio scrolls, they were Kushina and Minato’s, not yours. I’ll give them to Naruto one day.”

Carefully Obito pulled on the strings and hosted herself up out of the river mud and onto the dry bank. Her landing was more of a fall than anything else, but she was out, and hadn’t needed help.

Obito looked down at Jiraiya, “I’m done being your apprentice all together. I’ll get the papers revoked myself, you can take my seal licence if you want but I don’t think it will make much difference. The Budget department will fight for me to keep making them seals and they control most of the tower…”
“Wait,” Jiraiya jumped up next to her with one chakra enhanced leap. He just looked confused now, not at hint of his anger from before. “I’m not going to ask how you know about Naruto or your apprentice papers, or how you got the most unreasonable department on your side. But your apprenticeship - if you refuse that you won’t be protected, anything could happen to you—”

“Anything? Like getting tricked into going on an ANBU mission for Danzo? Or having people constantly mess with my files and papers? Or my clan doing everything short of physically dragging me to a temple to get married to one of our own?” Obito scoffed, “If that’s what you call protected, I’ll take my changes without your help.”

“Danzo did what?” Jiraiya gaped at her, looking dumbfounded.

“Go ask your precious teacher, since you trust him to do all your thinking for you!” Obito stormed off, nose in the air and just managed to get out of Jiraiya's sight before tripping over her own limbs and bumping into a tree.

*

Obito ended that day with a well-earned plate of dango, sitting with the late afternoon sun on her face at a stall across from the Hokage Tower. She felt washed out and tired but glad to finally have had her argument with Jiraiya. It had been draining but she felt it needed to happen. A lot of the things she had said to him had been building up for a while. The two revelations that Jiraiya wrote Icha Icha and was Godfather to Naruto had knocked away most of the affection she had held for him.

“May I join you?”

Obito opened her eyes to see Kurenai asking, holding a plate piled high with dango.

“Sure. If you can fit all that on one table.” Obito grinned.

“Funny.” Kurenai sat down with her usual gracefulness, despite the grubbiness of her presence, which spoke of a hard day of manual work. “I’m bulking up for my training, I need to improve my upper body strength.”

Obito admired her exposed arm muscles with envy. “You’re a genjutsu specialist, why do you need to build your strength?”

Kurenai started eating with purposeful chewing, “I need to have more skills, be more well-rounded. Jounin have more than one speciality.”

Obito smiled. “You’re going to be a Jounin?”

“One day,” Kurenai looked at her over a half empty skewer. “I have a five-year plan.”

“Of course you do. Ouch!” Obito took back her swatted hand from where it had been reaching for lone dango stick. “I’m glad someone has a plan for their life.”

“You’re a clan brat Obito. Your whole life has a plan.” Kurenai put the now empty skewer, looking to the side as she did so. “And isn’t that your clan head over there?”

“What. Where?” Obito ducked down and peered over the stall wall at the Tower entrance. “Yes, that’s Lord Fugaku. He’s wearing his formal robes.” She dimmed down her chakra instinctively and tried to think of anything she’d done wrong lately. “And isn’t that the Nara’s new clan head?”
“All of the shinobi clan heads, it looks like.” Kurenai frowned. “Something big must have happened, but they don’t seem too worked up.”

“Lord Fugaku is pissed,” Obito bent down over the table. “He’s got that look in his eyes, like he’s fighting not to activate his Sharingan.”

“You can tell from here?” Kurenai turned back to look at her. “Oh Obito, why do you have mud on your neck,” she reached over to wipe it off, “And your hair is a mess, don’t let any of them see you like this.”

“It’s fine, I’ll just hide until they’re all gone.” Obito batted away Kurenai’s fingers. “Stop it, it doesn’t matter how I look.”

“Obito you need to take some care with your appearance, you’re not a little boy any more-” Kurenai paused, tilted her head. “Little girl anymore? I don’t know which to use.”

“I don’t care which term you use.” Obito told her. “Boy, I suppose.”

“Just brush your hair a bit and put on some lipstick, a bit of eyeliner? Please?”

“It’s sweet you think I have any of those things on me.” Obito grinned and forgot about the clan heads, letting Kurenai get out her makeup bag and fuss over her.

* 

“Auntie! Auntie!” Obito was treated to the adorable sight of Itachi, grinning wildly and wearing cat ears on his head, running up to her as she made her way home. He stopped by her side and beamed up at her, stress lines gone from his face. “I completed my mission! We found the missing cat and I did what you said and let Shinko lead and at the end Tenma was nice to me!” He beamed up at her, looking like any other eight year old.

Obito caught Itachi in a hug, then pulled back to let her original Sharingan flicker on.

“Auntie?” Itachi stared up at her red eyes without fear. He had the look of longing all Uchiha children got before they realised the heavy burden that came with the Sharingan.

“I just need to memorise this image, you with cat ears and a smile.” Obito said, before turning off her eye and kissing his forehead. “You look so adorable.”

“I’m not adorable.” Itachi puffed out his cheeks, “I am a Genin of Konoha and I caught our target with a single shuriken throw.”

“Really? Tell me all about it,” Obito coaxed and they walk home together, Itachi cheerfully talking about his day. It sounded like a typical C-rank mission, hunting down a missing person, even if the person was in fact a cat and the search took place in the Sora-ku. The Cat Summon clan had always stuck Obito as weird. Supposedly they were the first summon animal the Uchiha clan as a whole had struck a contract with and should have been the most common summons the Uchiha used. But they were contrary creatures and almost always turned down potential summoners. Shisui was the only current cat summoner.

“Sasuke! I’m home!” Itachi shouted as they reached the clan head’s home and Itachi ran in to find his little brother. Obito watched him go with a smile then turned to find Mikoto watching her from the kitchen window.

“What’s this I hear from Izanami that you don’t want a big birthday party?” Mikoto asked, her
beautiful face pinched with irritation.

“There’s no point, I’m not really an adult.” Obito tried to explain, gesturing to her lack of a headband.

“And your family can’t celebrate you surviving another year? After everything you’ve put us through?”

Obito took the accusation without bulking. “That’s not what I’m saying- Why can’t we wait until I’m twenty and a real adult?”

Mikoto tilted her head, silky hair she had given to her son falling to the side. “You know why- Kamo isn’t long for this world, don’t you want him to see you all dressed up, like a proper adult, or do you want him to die thinking he’s left a venerable child behind?”

“That’s not fair!”

“Life’s not fair. The party is happening. With or without your input.” Mikoto declared and slammed the window shut before Obito could argue further.

The window reopened for Mikoto’s voice to drift out again. “And no, none of your outsider friends can come, we barely have enough time to prepare for the whole clan.”

Obito stuck her tongue out at the closed window.

* 

Kamo had caught a cold from somewhere and was more irritable than usual. Obito stayed home to care for him, copying out the seal books she might have to give back to Jiraiya, and refreshing herself on the basics as she went over them. She also got around to finally sorting through her small collection. She now had about thirty books and fifteen scrolls, from children’s work books from Uzushio to Orochimaru’s work notes for the past twenty years, and random seal works her clan had given her over time.

She also caught up on her own sewing projects and experiments, improving and streamlining her own seal work. It was a productive three days, apart from family taking advantage of her absence from work to bother with their own petty demands.

“I can’t teach you sealing, my apprentice licence means I’m subject to the laws now. Only practisers and ranks above that are allowed to share knowledge. I have to obey the village laws.” Obito said again to a Chuunin Uchiha who had been part of her informal seal lessons before and now wanted more tutoring.

“It’s just a little seal Obito, to use in the office. Come on!” Haruki coaxed, “Who cares about what a clueless apprentice does, you’re like an academy student. No real harm in sharing what you know.”

“Chuunin level actually.” Obito muttered into her needlework.

“I see no headband. Just do the seal and I’ll watch and copy it. Easy.” Haruki pulled on a curl of her hair, making her wince.

“I said no.” Obito’s voice remained steady.

Haruki stood up to loom over her and his face set into a stern glare. “I am a senior member of this clan. A respected police officer. And I am telling you to teach me the seals I need to serve the clan.”
Obito put down her work and tried to loom back at him as best she could without standing. “You just want them so you can finish your desk work faster. And as a police officer you should be glad I’m following the law!” Obito argued back, getting flustered. She wasn’t close to Haruki at all, she didn’t know what he’d do if she continued to refuse.

Haruki’s face hardened further and he started using his police sergeant voice. “Obito Uchiha. I order you to -”

“Do not raise your voice to MY granddaughter in MY house!” Kamo’s voice hissed, coming back to himself for the first time that day. Obito and Haruki were both startled by his voice, having thought he was asleep in his armchair behind them in the sitting room.

They turned to see Kamo standing in the doorway, eyes focused, and steady hand pointed at Haruki. “I remember you pissing yourself when Fugaku found you with contraband items during the war. I remember you begging him not to report you to the elders. I’m old but I can still turn you into the village council.”

Haruki rearranged his expression from startled to oily pleasantness. “You’re confused Elder-""

Obito’s grandfather was steady on his feet and in his glare. “I am Kanaya Uchiha, the son of Nishino of the Endless Barrage and descendent of Baru the Untouchable. And you are Haruki Uchiha, without a Sharingan to your bloodline in four generations. Get out of my house.”

With grunt of disinterest that fooled no one Haruki slowly left, giving Obito one last frown over his shoulder. Obito showed him a hand gesture she had learnt in prison and his scandalised face almost made her smile.

As soon as Haruki left, Kamo collapsed heavily into the kitchen chair next to Obito. “You can’t let them bully you Obito.” He said earnestly. “You’re not a little girl any more. You’re the last of Baru’s line, of my father’s line. You have a right to refuse any elder save the Clan head.” He took her shaking hand and looked at her firmly.

Obito swallowed and when she still couldn’t talk, swallowed again. “You always told me to be obedient and respect my elders.” she whispered.

Kamo sighed and looked regretful. “That was when you and I were one of many of Baru’s line and nowhere near the first to inherit. I had five siblings between me and head of the branchline and they all had children and grandchildren. You didn’t need to know anything about politics or standing up for yourself. I thought my family would always be there to support you against the other branch lines.” Kamo sighed deeply still holding her hand. “There’s so much I should have taught you, shown you, before I got this old and senile.”

“Tell me now.” Obito begged uncertain of how long Kamo’s lucidness and grip on reality would last. “Can I really tell Haruki to get lost without getting into trouble?”

“Only if you do it in the right way.” Kamo blinked, visibly trying to stay focused. “Haruki was out of line and he knew it. You just had to call him on it, not even bring up old issues to threaten him. But I wanted him to give up fast, so I could talk to you.” He sighed deeply. “Maybe I should have encouraged you to marry Inabi. He’s good at this sort of thing.”

“Inabi’s moved on to flirting with Naomi’s youngest brother.” Obito told him.

“That’s probably a trick of some kind, Inabi wouldn’t want to marry any of the adopted Uchiha. Especially a male one. Not good enough for Inabi’s ambitions.”
“I’m an adopted Uchiha.” Obito muttered bitterly. “Why am I good enough for him?”

Kamo patted her cheek gently, a much more welcome touch than the hair pulling from Haruki. “Only technically and you know that. Just because your parents didn’t officially announce your birth to the clan doesn’t lessen the fact that both of them had Uchiha blood. Never let anyone try and tell you different.” Kamo said sternly. “Even if your parents had lived you would have still been a part of this clan. When I die you will be the last living carrier of Baru’s bloodline. Of your father’s namesake Rai. That gives you obligations and power you have to acknowledge.”

“I don’t want to think about you dying. I love you.” Obito kissed the hand still holding onto hers.

“I love you too, but we have to be practical. Our clan always has some plot or another brewing and you need to know how to navigate around them.” Kamo closed his eyes and opened them again with great effort. “I’m tired, I need to sleep. You still have those seals up in my study? The ones from our eye surgery?”

“Yes.” It seemed like a long time ago since Obito had put up the simple seals designed to look like embroidery decoration on the walls. She could do stronger better seals than those in half the time and effort now.

“Keep them activated and go look in the study before the Elders start taking away things.”

Obito started to ask something else, but someone approached the kitchen door and they stopped talking to turn and see who it was.

Izanami let herself into the house using a key that Obito heartily regretted giving her years before. “Hello darlings,” Izanami said brightly, as if she and Obito hadn’t had a shouting match about her party outfit two days ago. “I’ve finally got a list of all the potential dishes we can serve! Isn’t that exciting?”

Kamo didn’t comment, just got up and went to his armchair, abandoning Obito to further reluctant party planning.

“Now here’s the selection I think is best, but you can add one or two others if you want.” Izanami said brightly dropping down the lists over Obito’s open seal book. She turned to the sink and started drying dishes that were perfectly fine being left to air dry and just generally tidying things that didn’t need tidying. Obito pinched herself to keep from snapping at her aunt.

“None of the dishes you picked are ones Kamo can eat easily anymore. And I don’t think most of the kids will like them either. I’ll pick some simpler recipes to use.” Obito finally said when she could keep the irritation from her voice.

“Oh,” Izanami said carelessly, not turning from where she was taking things out to cook a meal. “Kamo’s not going to be there, or any of the little ones. Don’t worry about them.”

“What?” Obito dropped down the list to stare at her aunt’s back, “What do you mean Kamo’s not going to be there? He’s my closest family member, he’s going to be seated right next to me the whole night.”

“Oh dear,” Izanami finally turned to look at Obito, “All those people and all that noise? For an entire night? It seems selfish to force him to endure all that confusion just because you want him there. I already asked Daiki to stay over with Kamo and make sure he has a nice night in.”

“Why don’t I stay home with Kamo and Daiki can go in my place.” Obito suggested, teeth clenched together with building anger.
“Don’t be silly, it’s your party Obito!”

“Is it? Is it really?” Obito reached across the table to point at the giant party file. “Because I don’t think there’s a single thing in this party I had a say in. I don’t like more than half the clan members you’ve invited, I don’t like the colours, the venue, the style, my outfit. And now you tell me that the one person I really want to have by my side on my birthday can’t come?” She stood up. “Why don’t you stop pretending my opinion matters at all and just do the whole thing yourself!” Obito stormed towards the door, ignoring her aunt’s objections. “I don’t want any dinner, don’t wait for me to eat.” She called before slamming the door shut between herself and her objecting aunt.

*

Obito got out of the compound after arguing the guards that it was another five whole hours until curfew, she was a seal apprentice damnit she’d be fine for the evening.

She got an emergency whistle anyway, like she was a helpless kid. Obito had no real destination in mind, just the need to get away from her family after three days continued Uchiha company.

Obito found herself wandering towards Ichiraku half idea to go talk to Teuchi about Naruto’s visit to his stall. Maybe get his input on what Minato and Kushina had been thinking, making Jiraiya his Godfather. But a familiar dog ran up to her in the street, in disguise without his coat or headband.

“Woof,” Uhei said. “Woof woof.” And wagged his tail wildly while nudging Obito with his nose into a deserted turn of the road.

“You do know you have to actually bark, not say ‘woof woof’?” Obito asked him with amusement, already bending down to pet his head.

“It hurts my throat,” Uhei whined, pressing into her hand. “I only make the real barks on missions.” He tilted his head to get Obito to scratch his ears, “I missed you.”

“I missed you too.” She assured him, scratching with both hands now.

“Mmmm, I’m supposed to ask you a question from Boss.” Uhei reluctantly pulled away to sit up seriously. “He wants to know if he’s allowed to read the book you wrote?”

“I didn’t write it by myself,” Obito corrected him without thinking, “I don’t see why he needs my permission.”

“He thought it might be weird.”

“What could possibly be weird about him reading the porn book I rewrote from our teacher’s teacher’s original work?” Obito rolled her eyes, “Kakashi can read whatever he wants. I won’t stop him.”

“Alright!” Uhei stood and turned to leave, “Let’s go tell him that!”

“Wait,” Obito said as Uhei took a few steps away. “I’m not going, I have stuff to do.” She lied.

“Oh,” Uhei sat and looked up at her with pleading eyes, “But I thought you and boss made up.”

“We sort of did, but-“

“And he hasn’t seen you in days-“

“I’ll see him around-“
“He’s got a long-term mission tomorrow, he wanted to see you before he left.” Uhei tilted his head giving off the most manipulative pleading look Obito had ever seen.

She sighed. “Fine. Where is he now?”

“I’ll show you!” Uhei bolted off into the maze of side streets and Obito followed.

* 

“This is Kakashi’s apartment building Uhei!” Obito snapped angrily. “You didn’t tell me we were going to his home!” The sneaky dog had brought her along a route she hadn’t used before and only realised where she was when they turned a corner and the familiar building came into view.

Uhei sounded innocently confused. “Where else would he be? I’ll help you get up the stairs.”

“NO.” Obito stopped and put down her feet firmly. “I am not going up to his apartment uninvited. It’s rude and it’s late.”

“But we came so far! Just go up and say hi!”

“Uhei, did Kakashi even send you on a mission to find me?” Obito demanded, a suspicion creeping up on her.

“He wanted to ask you a question! I did what Pakkun is always telling me to do: anticipate orders!” Uhei whined. He bit into the bottom hem of Obito’s shirt, “Come on, let’s go up.” He spoke around the fabric in his mouth.

“Let go! Let go of me now! Bad! Bad dog.” Obito hissed as she was hauled towards the stairwell door. Kakashi’s window, three stories up, was open and her voice could carry if she yelled. “Let go now or I’ll never belly scratch you again!”

Uhei stopped pulling her forward to give a startled look, then let go abruptly.

“Ha!” Obito wiped her shirt and turned to leave. She didn’t hear Uhei jump, but she did feel the full brunt of Uhei landing on the back of her leg, bringing her face down in the ground. Uhei threw back his head to howl before Obito could even get her face out of the dirt.

“Uhei, who are you sitting on? Is that- What are you doing to Obito?” Kakashi’s voice called down from his window.

Obito groaned, almost as loudly as Uhei’s howls and brought her arms up around her face, willing herself not to combust with embarrassment.

* 

A few minutes later, Obito was in Kakashi’s apartment, Uhei banished to the dog’s land undaunted by the lecture he had gotten, and seated on the only open space of the table, while Kakashi fusssed about getting something to clean her face.

“I am so sorry, I don’t know what he was thinking. Are you sure you’re okay? We can go to the hospital right now.” Kakashi almost fluttered around, searching amongst his efficiently sorted mission gear, all neatly laid out to be packed. Obito sat next to a pile of freshly cleaned and sharpened kunai and willed herself not to combust with embarrassment.

“I am not going to the hospital and telling people I let a dog knock me to the ground. I’d rather reset
“He broke your nose!” Kakashi was in front of her, reaching to examine her dirt covered nose before she could blink. “You should have said something. I know an ice jutsu—“

Obito clamped her hand around his wrist and gently pulled her face out of his grip. “I was being dramatic. I do that sometimes. My nose is fine.”

“Oh,” Kakashi stared at her for a second, until Obito realised she was still holding onto his wrist and let him go to look away. Her blush was starting to really piss her off. She looked down at the whetstones and unsharpened kunai next to them, waiting for Kakashi to step away from her.

Instead, he pressed a damp cloth into her hands. “Wash your face with that. I’ll find something clean for you to wear.”

“No,” Obito managed to choke out, refusing to linger on the idea of her taking off her clothes in front of him. “I can use the seals, but the dirt will just fall off and I don’t want to dirty the floor…”

“Shower?”

“Urgh,” her blush deepened, as memories of the last time she had been in his shower flashed through her mind. “I’ll just stay like this. It’s fine.”

“Obito?” Kakashi frowned at her, innocent confusion on his masked face. “You are covered in dirt and leaves. There are twigs in your hair.”

“...Okay fine. Shower.” She muttered and pulled herself to her feet. Kakashi hovered near her, but didn’t say anything as she walked to his tiny bathroom and shut the door behind her.

She wiped her face clean and picked out all the twigs and leaves in her hair. Then she stepped into the shower and activated the dirt seals, making the dirt and leaves fall from her clothing to the shower bottom. Obito stepped out of the shower and started the water to wash away the dirt. While the water ran she took up one of the threadbare towels hanging by the sink and pressed it to her mouth. And screamed out her mortification until she ran out of breath.

Then she calmly hung up the towel again, finished getting the shower clean again and turned the water off. When she stepped out of the bathroom her plan had been to leave as fast as she could, unable to handle normal conversation with Kakashi without some mental preparations. She hadn’t come to any resolution with her feelings towards him, putting it off in favour of clan drama and fuuinjutsu attempts.

“So, I’ll just be going—“ Obito started to say but stopped talking at the sight of Kakashi pushing the pile of old kunai off the table into a bin. “What are you doing! Those kunai are fine!” she strode forward to snatch the bin away and peer down into the bin. Empty tins and foil mixed in with old weapons. “Why are you throwing away half your kit?”

Kakashi shrugged, unconcerned. “They’re the dullest. I get a weapon allowance to replace them all anyway, might as well save myself the work and get replacements from HQ.”

Obito gave him a look of indignation. “There are Genin who hunt through training grounds for rusty weapons to use and you are wasting of dozens of perfectly servable blades. Pass me your sharpening kit.”

Kakashi passed over the stand and various grades of whetstones to her, watching without comment at Obito took up a scratched kunai and started to work it against the roughest of his whetstones.
When it was clear Obito was engrossed in her work, he went back to packing his other gear and clothing.

One of the first duties Uchiha children learnt was how to care for shuriken and kunai. It was dull time-consuming work, but it taught discipline and concentration to children while also serving the purpose of saving the warriors of the clan time and effort. The sharpness of a kunai could mean life or death in the field. Obito had spent hours surrounded by her kinsmen, everyone cleaning and sharpening weapons to be used again. It was a bonding ritual to Uchiha.

And it was a calming activity to Obito herself. No one yelled at her or made sly digs at her while she was working diligently. Just as when she was sewing her mind could divide itself, let her fingers do the familiar work while her mind tackled difficult subjects. Obito’s ran a kunai against the whetstone again and again while her mind went over the difficulties of her seal making on clay and mud. She was having issues with applying seals to the mud pipes, glueing paper fuuinjutsu to the pipes after they had hardened naturally wasn’t working.

Obito was so focused on her tasks that she only looked up when there were no more weapons to fish out of the bin. She rolled her stiff neck and saw everything that had been out was gone, a mission pack sitting by the door. The apartment was now spotless and tidy, apart from the dirt rags she had used and a random assortment of food items sitting by Kakashi’s sink.

“Know any recipes that use a lot of perishables?” Kakashi asked her, holding up half an eggplant and a sad looking packet of pears.

“No,” Obito massaged her neck, slightly alarmed at how stiff it was. How long had she been here? Her stomach gave a loud gurgle, informing her it was dinner time. “Can I have the pears?”

Without comment Kakashi washed and cut up the pears, adding various other fruit to the plate he put down in front of Obito. She wiped her hands on a cleanish rag, put away the tools she had been using and ate.

“Long mission?” she asked after a while as Kakashi sorted through his fridge.

“Classified.”

“Yes, yes. I know. Any idea when you’ll be back?” Obito sighed.

“Really classified,” Kakashi repeated.

“Is there anything you can tell me?” Obito rolled her eyes in exasperation.

There was a brief moment of silence.

“…I’ll miss you.” Kakashi turned to look at her as he made his admission. “And I think from the way you’ve been acting… you’ll miss me too?” He said cautiously, closing the fridge door.

Obito stared down at her lap and nodded hesitantly. She felt Kakashi come closer and settle down next to her.

“Obito? When you came back, I thought that just having you be alive was everything I could want.” Kakashi said softly, tentatively. “And then, when you started talking to me, I thought that being your friend, having you in my life was more than I ever deserved to have.”

“You do deserve to be happy.” Obito interjected. “You deserve to have everything you want in life.”
“You say that, and after everything else I thought maybe it was better if we stayed apart. But… if there’s a chance that we could go back and be more than than friends, I wanted to tell you that I would like to try dating again.” He looked down and mumbled, “Without the secrets.”

Obito stared at him. A small part of her was so proud of Kakashi for verbalising his feelings and attempting to communicate his wants. The rest of her was sad, sad and intimidated, that this genius shinobi wanted to get together with a mess like her.

She closed her eyes. “You don’t really feel that way. Not really. It’s just hormones and our past. You’ll get over it. Find someone new. Someone better. No one really stays with the first person they sleep with.” Obito opened her eyes, feeling raw as she looked at him. “I am not the sort of person you think I need or deserve. I want to know what your feelings are.” Kakashi started to sound a bit angry.

“You-”

“No.” Kakashi stood up and stared at her. “You. Obito, what do you want? Tell me and I’ll abide by it. But you have to say it.”

“I-“ Obito breathed, shaking. “I want- so many things… I want Minato and Rin and Kushina and everyone to be alive. I want Naruto to be safe and loved. I want half my body not to be scarred and in constant pain. I want you to be happy. Truly happy and content with your life. I want my heart not to ache everything I think of you, because I know I love you and I know it will do nothing but bring us both pain. I was selfish to push myself on you, when I can’t promise you anything in return. I can’t leave my clan, and they’ll never let me be with you casually. And I don’t want to keep us a secret. Not again.” She curled into herself, ashamed of what she had just revelled.

“So you’re just going to do what they want? Let your family dictate your whole life? Always?” Kakashi demanded, staring at her hard. He seemed to have missed her accidental declaration of love.

“That’s what being in a clan means. You have to pay back what you were given.” Obito explained sadly.

“They’ve given you nothing but insults and abuse, as far as I ever saw.” Kakashi snapped.

Obito frowned at him. “How can you say that! They love me. They do. I- they fed me and clothed me and gave me everything I have. Everything I am is because of the Uchiha clan. Without them I’d be nothing!” She said angrily, breaking her resolution to stay calm and keep a hold of her temper.
But Kakashi didn’t seem to mind. In fact, he spoke back just as angrily pulling down his mask to bare his teeth. “You’re not nothing! You’ve mastered a new type of fuuinjutsu and earned a job in the tower, you tangled with Danzo and prevented his schemes from succeeding. You have a way of helping people and making them better, which I can never understand. None of those things are from your clan, that’s you; you and your heart and talents. Everything your clan gave you, you’ve paid them back for. And they still treat you like trash!”

“They do not! They love me. They know me. They-” the memory of the past day of dealing with drama of a party she did not want rushed through her mind along with all the petty bullying and the put downs she got all the time. “They mean well.” Obito said lamely. She hugged herself. “When I needed them, they were there. They helped me get better, made sure I got medical care and treatment.”

Kakashi scoffed. “Yeah, and when you didn’t do what they wanted right away, they took your leg and kept your new one from you. Remember that? You getting kidnapped because you had to defend your family’s children with one leg and your own skills. Remember how you got yourself free? Remember how they didn’t apologise for the leg or thank you for saving the kids?”

“I don’t-“

“I can understand if you don’t want to be with me. That’s completely understandable. But don’t use your family as an excuse. Just be honest.”

“Listen Kakashi,” Obito began, letting her anger and indignation replace her conflict and sadness, “I wouldn’t lie to you about my feelings. You asked for an answer and I gave it to you. If I could I would be with you. But my family comes first. Grandfather is getting weaker and more confused every day, I have to be there for him. I have to be there for Itachi and Shisui and Sakuya… they need me.”

Kakashi looked sceptical. “Is that what you really believe or is that what they want you to think?”

Obito scowled. “Hey! I’m sorry I can’t tell you that I’m willing to leave my entire life behind to be with you, but I can’t lie. You said no more secrets.”

“Yes, I did say that.” Kakashi sighed and moved towards the front door.

Unable to help herself Obito leaned into him as he went past her, clutching at the front of his shirt. “I’m sorry. You deserve better.” she muttered into his chest.

Kakashi gave a deep shuddering sigh and wrapped his arms around her. “There is no one better than you.” He said softly into her ear. They stood there embraced for a long minute, Obito burying her face in his chest, each resigned to their fate. It was a good way to say goodbye.

Finally Obito gathered enough willpower to lift her head and start pulling away. Unfortunately that was the same time Kakashi choose to lower his face to kiss her on the top of the head.

Their mouths met accidently, a gentle collision of lips as they both moved their heads. There was a pause, eyes meeting, and the very air seemed to waver around them.

It was hard to say who leaned in for another, proper kiss, or who was the one to add tongue and moaning to the process. It was certainly Obito who dragged them both back to the table and insistently climbed into Kakashi’s lap, but Kakashi was the one who started pulling off clothing first.

“Just- so we’re clear,” Obito managed to say as she reached around to help Kakashi with her bra clasp. “This is an awful, terrible idea and will all end in tears.”
“There are always tears with you.” Kakashi told her pulling down her straps to kiss her shoulder scars. “Might as well have some happy ones first.”

* 

Obito stumbled into the compound two minutes before curfew, underwear in a pocket, legs still weak from the second round of sex, and grin of manic panic and joy keeping the guards from asking any questions about her evening.

She got home to find Izanami had left a list of invitations for fifty individual Uchiha in the kitchen for Obito to write out and deliver. Obito dropped them all in the trash and went to bed, still high on endorphins.

* 

“Alright Apprentice, let’s see what progress you’ve made.” Washoku Akimichi said to Obito the next day, having come down from his fancy office to inspect Obito’s work for his pet project with the sewage.

Triumphantly Obito put down a small hand sculpted pipe made of children’s play clay.

“What am I looking at?” the Akimichi asked, looking confused. His goatee twitched as he cautiously poked the bright orange item.

“Try and smash it,” Obito smiled with confidence.

Washoku raised an eyebrow and slapped his hand down. The other things on the desk jostled, but the pipe remained unharmed. He blinked and picked it up, trying to bend it. It remained unaffected, as solid as a rock. Washoku brought the pipe up to his eyes, stared at the fuuinjutsu Obito had etched into the clay with a needle eye and tried to scratch the inscriptions off with his fingernails. The symbols encircling the top of the pipe remained unchanged.

“It’s waterproof too and doesn’t get affected by heat or cold.” Obito said proudly. “I’ve got a bunch of them buried in my garden, just to see how they hold up over time, but I think I’ve mastered the first two seals needed for your project.”

“Yes well, this seems adequate.” Washoku said neutrally and put down the pipe. He pulled out a clipboard full of paperwork. “We’ll have to wait for the proper clay to arrive and do tests on life sized pipes, but it is very impressive. Carry on the good work.” He signed a few papers, gave Obito a tower cheque for her progress and left her to crow to the Research department.

She walked into the main room of the department waving the cheque triumphantly. “Lunch outside of the Tower today! My treat!” Obito announced to the various office workers, who looked up from their quiet work in surprise.

Abe, her supervisor and person Obito spent the most time with in the Nidaime’s library of fuuinjutsu, peered down at the total of the cheque. “That’s it? You recreate jutsu that are practically lost to the village and spend days working with mud and clay, and they pay you that much?”

“It’s just my bonus, I get a salary too.” Obito said happily. “Though most of it goes to my clan for the medic care I’ve had. My savings are slowly growing.”

“Right,” Abe exchanged looks with the rest of the research department workers. “…you do work for the budget department in your free time, don’t you? They like your work?”
“Well, Akuria was cackling about affording new textbooks for the Academy and finally paying off the debt to the Fire Lord’s council when I showed her the seals this morning. I’m going to put the Nidaime’s seals on the great arena, if I have time outside of my official duties.” Obito said modestly.

“I don’t see why everyone is so scared with that department. They seem very reasonable. Really generous with their payments too. I though Lady Kukabu was crazy when she changed my price list for seal work. But so far no one’s argued about the high prices.”

Abe took of his glasses and rubbed them clean with a tissue, mouth moving silently as he stared into an unseen distance. When he put them back on he looked resolved. “I think, before you spend that cheque you should show it to the budget department. For tax reasons.”

Obito smiled in confusion. “Okay? If you think so.”

*

Being dragged around was a familiar situation for Obito. Her childhood had been full of situations where grownups had felt the need to physically direct him where he was supposed to be looking or going. So she wasn’t too alarmed when the tiny Lady Kukabu appeared at her side a few hours later, and dragged Obito out of her office by her good arm. She was certain the venerable kimono maker would tell her what she’d done wrong soon enough.

Obito had been a bit confused when Lady Kukabu had stopped to grab Washoku too as they went past his office and dragged him along by the ear, muttering about waste of human resources and abuse of family connections. But Obito was sure it would all be explained very soon.

When they kept going up the tower levels, Lady Kukabu snapping her fingers imperiously at the nearest shinobi to help Obito and herself up the stairs at each floor, she did start to worry. Avoiding the Hokage’s attention was very high on Obito’s list of things to do.

“I’m really sorry I upset you Lady Kukabu,” Obito said as they reached the top floor. “I’ll give you back some of the payment you gave me for the seals of your storehouse, no problem. We really don’t need to bother the Hokage.”

“Listen to the girl,” Agreed Washoku, still being dragged along by his ear. Since Kukabu was so short and he so tall, he had to bend over to keep his ear attached to his head. “My family has a restaurant near here, let me take you there for lunch and we can discuss the matter calmly.”

“Are you trying to bribe me Akimichi?” demanded Kukabu, not slowing down as they walked through the door to the general mission room.

“No Lady, of course not!”

Kukabu dragged them past a waiting room full of shinobi on call for new missions (Obito waved at the three people she recognised. They gave her looks of alarm.) and finally stopped by a reception desk Obito recognised with trepidation. The Hokage’s unruffled secretary greeted Kukabu and said the Hokage was expecting her. Lady Kukabu nodded, as if it was normal for her to show up uninvited at the Hokage’s office with people in tow and pushed Obito into a chair by the office door.

The old lady looked Obito in the eye for the first time since spotting her at her work desk. “You wait here while I talk to the youngster. Do not offer to lower your prices again or I really will get cross.” Lady Kukabu then strode through the office door, Washoku still being dragged by his ear after her.

Obito blinked, trying to process the entire situation and flinched when the secretary came up with an elegant tea brewing kit on a silver tray, complete with snacks and firmly put it down on the table next
“With the budget department’s compliments.” The middle-aged man said tonelessly then returned to his desk.

“What did I do to upset them?” Obito whispered, trying not to panic. She had just shown them the Tower check Washoku had given her, plus at their insistence, the work logs of her research time in the Tower the last few months and at home with buckets of clay. They had sent her off without a word about how she had charged them much more for the seals she had sewn for them. Maybe they blamed Lady Kukabu for her high price list and that’s what the old lady was talking to the Hokage about?

“Just eat and drink, they’ll be in there for a while. Lots of manners and personal recollections before those two get to the point.” The secretary pulled out a book with a familiar cover Obito had helped design and opened it to the bookmark near the end.

Obito ate and drank, in case it was her last free Tower meal, then pulled out her tiny travel sewing kit, adding more embroidery to the hem of her shirt for a lack of anything else to do.

“Lady Obito?” a confused voice called and she looked up to see Hizashi Hyuuga coming into the reception room, two ANBU behind him.

“Hello Hizashi!” Obito tied off her thread and put away her kit. “Is your clan out and about yet? Any word on an agreement with Kumo?” She gestured to the chair next to her, “The hospital is overrun with work without Hyuuga medics. And the sentries around the village are complaining so much! I hope everyone remembers how important the Hyuuga are to Konoha in a week when things go back to normal!”

“Yes.” Hizashi settled next to her stiffly, seemingly shaken at her presence here. “May I ask why you are waiting to see the Hokage?”

“No idea.” She gave a wavering smile. “Lady Kukabu; she’s the kimono maker who made all four Hokage robes and is unofficial head of the textile workers in Konoha, she dragged me and my supervisor Washoku Akimichi here. I think she doesn’t like the plumbing project we’re working on. Or maybe she wants new plumbing first. Are you alright? You look-“

Hizashi looked tired and on edge, like a shinobi on a mission expecting trouble at any moment. His clothing was more formal than Obito had seen him wear before, a robe meant for audience’s and meetings, not work or travel.

“I’m going on a long term assignment shortly, the preparations for it have been excessive.” Hizashi said shortly, as the ANBU who had entered with him took up guard positions by either door. “I’m glad to see you, I feared I would not before I go.”

“I wish it was in a more relaxed setting.” Obito waved a hand around the formal waiting room. “I was looking forward to going to your home for my appointments with Mariko again.”

“She does enjoy your visits. Mariko has spent a lot of her free time these past weeks seeking new exercises and techniques to use on your injuries. She sees you as a personal challenge.” Hizashi smiled fondly as he spoke of his wife. “It’s her drive I’ve always admired about her, I’m so grateful she’s passed it on to Neji.”

“Your family is pretty great.” Obito agreed. “Even if your clan as a whole never responded to my clan’s official messages of support.”
“We did send a note of thanks to your elders, though we’ve decided on... our own course of reprisal. Sometimes the simplest course of action is best.” Hizashi said as if he was reciting a statement he had heard from someone else.

“...you guys aren’t going to kidnap one of Kumo’s kids are you?” Obito lowered her voice hesitantly. “Because that won’t solve anything. Just put more innocents in danger.”

“No. We will address our grievances to their kage directly.” Hizashi smiled serenely. “You’ll keep an eye on Mariko and Neji while I’m gone, won’t you Obito?”

“Of course! Although those two are so competent. I think Neji is already a more mature person than I’ll ever be-“

Kukabu stalked out of the Hokage’s office, Washoku left behind. “Where’s that Tower cheque they gave you today?” she demanded.

Obito pulled it out as fast as she could and was only slightly surprised when Lady Kukabu tore it up. “I suppose it’s lunch at the cafeteria again.” She said sadly.

Lady Kukabu sniffed. “What did I tell you about valuing your own skills? That idiot was grossly underpaying you for his stupid pet project. He’s got too many connections for me to get it stopped altogether but you will be paid better for your time. Those paper pushers were smart to call me in.” She fixed Obito with a stern look. “If I have to come in again for something like this I’ll be dragging you around by a piece of anatomy far more uncomfortable than an ear, got it?”

“Yes, Lady Kukabu.” Obito said automatically. What else could you say to such a threat?

“Good. And avoid eating at any of the Akimichi restaurants for a few weeks, in case they feel upset about the fuss.” Kukabu glanced over Obito’s tray of snacks, tugged up the string purse on her obi and nonchalantly poured the entire plate into it. Obito glanced around, Hizashi didn’t react at all, lost in his world. The secretary kept his eyes glued to his book and the ANBU remained unmoving statues.

Without shame Kukabu took her leave and Obito scurried after her. “Good-bye Hizashi!”

“Good-bye, Obito. Be well.” Hizashi smiled after her until the door closed and cut off her view of him, tired but tranquil.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think and point out any mistakes I’ve made. Apart from plot I mean, those are unfixable at this point.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Obito is told to try controlling her own life. So of course she immediately gets caught up with would-be revolutionary and about four different plots against the village. At least her side kick Tenzo is adorable?

Chapter Notes

Basically filler chapter before the dramatic climax of this story. Which means there is too much overbuilding and probably not enough coherency. YuliaLeafhill did their very best, over 200 mistakes betaed plus attempting to keep the plot on track but.... Well I had fun writing this, at the very least

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After escaping the Hokage’s waiting room and returning to the Research and Archive Department, Obito devoted the rest of the day to quietly working on her fuuinjutsu notes and sewing, being as unnoticeable as possible. She didn’t think the Hokage would blame her for Lady Kukabu storming into his office, but she thought it would be wise to lay low for a while. Throughout the work day various people popped in to see if she was alright and why she had been seen being dragged to the Hokage’s office.

“You okay there, Obito?” asked Asuma poking his head in the door. “Want to go to lunch and bitch about my Dad for a while?”

“As much fun as treason talk sounds, I have some work to finish up,” Obito told him with a tired smile. “And I thought you and your father were on better terms these days.”

“Please,” Asuma leaned against the door, “We’d have to be able to talk for more than five minutes about something other than duty and expectations to be on any kind of terms.” He frowned, looking pensive. “I think he knows more about the various rebel factions in Kiri and the food rationing in Iwa than what’s going on with me.” Asuma sighed and shifted, turning to go. “See you around Obito.”

“See you,” Obito finished the last word in a long to-do list of ordered seals and started to pack away her things. She was meeting Kyoko and a few others of the writing group for lunch. Kyoko thought it was a good idea for the more involved members of the group to know they were risking the wrath of one of the Sannin by rewriting his work. Obito was going to assure everyone of how unlikely it was that Jiraiya would ever find out, seeing as he was out of the village most of the time and had his head firmly buried in the sand when it came to reality.

“Everything alright?” asked Akina Uchiha gruffly as they met walking towards the stairs. “Heard you got sent to the Top. Need a Jounin to go speak on your behalf?”

“No thank-you Auntie,” Obito said readying herself to start climbing the stairs. “I didn’t get into trouble, I was just associated with it.”
“Story of your life, huh kid?” Without warning, Akina reached out and scooped Obito up into her arms, climbing the stairs without pause. “Try and keep your head down, Lord Fugaku and his bunch are pissed off about some village decision.” She put Obito down as they reached the end of the stairs and walked off to her own destination.

Obito straightened her clothing and decided not to make a fuss about being manhandled without warning or the stinging pain by being put down so abruptly. Akina had just being trying to help her.

* 

After a lunch spent reassuring the writing circle that, in the unlikely event of Jiraiya finding out about them, Obito had more than enough blackmail and emotional manipulation to keep him from personally stopping them, and Kyoko reiterated that they weren’t doing anything illegal or wrong anyway, they ended the meeting agreeing they should start rewriting the next book in the series. Even with half the money Come and Go Away had made invested by Kyoko, the dozen odd members of the group had each made a tidy sum from their share of the profits.

“I can finally pay back the cost of horse I borrowed!” Obito said cheerfully, looking at the bank statement Kyoko showed her.

“What kind of horse?” One of the part time Genin demanded, whose other job in animal rearing had made her tear up and rewrite most of Jiraiya’s chapter featuring the lonely farmer’s wife. (Apparently farmers’ wives who had time to laze about in haystacks half naked had more to worry about than loneliness. And anyway, who ever heard of a farm being lonely, do you know how many people it took to run a farm that could produce enough wine for two to bathe in?)

“The kind of horse that costs a lot.” Obito shrugged, while Kyoko passed over the official debt slip she had insisted on getting belatedly from Naomi’s in-laws for the borrowed horse.

“I can get you a pack horse for half this amount.” The farming Genin said, looking at the debt slip. “The Nara owe me for all the times their deer get into our store house.”

“I think I have a seal for that,” Obito muttered and dug around in her satchel for her notebook. By the time she had found it, Kyoko and the Genin had negotiated about the prices and written out a contract of their own.

“Read it carefully, Obito.” Kyoko demanded handing it to Obito. “Read it twice and ask if you don’t understand anything. This isn’t Tower mission work, you’ve got to make sure you’re getting a fair deal. It’s your money that’s on the line, not the villages.”

“But I trust you, Kyoko.” Obito protested, shoving back the contract.

“You trusted your family and you trusted the Tower, and look how your paperwork turned out.” Hissed Kyoko, while the rest of the table politely talked amongst themselves pretending not to hear. “You need to start trusting yourself and no one else when it comes to your personal affairs. I could make a mistake one day, or have to choose my own interest over yours. You have to be more aware of what’s going on around you!”

“You heard about the thing with Lady Kukabu,” Sighed Obito and reluctantly fixed her eyes on the document before her.

“Of course I did. The budget department came hunting for your file and wanted to know why I had it in a locked desk drawer. When department head found out I’m personally assigned to your paperwork she hinted she’d see me promoted if I keep you focused on practical fuuinjutsu, not
frivolous projects like the Akimichi had planned.”

“Village upgrades and improvements are important Kyoko.” Another circle member gently spoke. “Half the east quarter still have soil outhouses as their only toilets. Obito’s sewage project will improve a lot of lives.”

“But only after all the clan homes get new bathrooms first…” muttered the farming Genin. “Could you make a seal barrier that shocks the deer if they try to eat my plants?”

“Those deer are sacred!”

“Then the Nara should feed them on time!”

*

Obito worked overtime that day, lingering at her desk until she had neat copies of all the seals she would use on the sewage project, and a tricky little seal that would stop deer (and Nara deer keepers) from crossing property lines without causing them any harm. She would need to test it before giving it out, having the Akimichi angry with her was enough trouble without getting their allies upset too.

By the time Obito got to her locker it was deserted, most of the day workers gone and the night shift just getting started. She saw no one until she reached the staircase.

With a tired sigh, Obito took a hold of the railing and slowly began her descent. It seemed so stupid, that she could walk without pain, could do most things without issue, but going up or down a few stairs pulled on every bad muscle in her body. There seemed to be no way to fix it.

“Obito!” A voice called after she managed the first five steps. Kakashi looked down at her, dressed in regular Jounin uniform and Chuunin jacket. “Can I help you down?”

Obito gritted her teeth. “Fine, whatever.” She muttered angry as always that she was caught unable to manage such a simple thing. She waited to be picked up, tensing her shoulder to keep it from stinging when it would be gripped.

But Kakashi simply stopped one stair down from her and offered her his arm to lean on, waiting for her to accept it. Obito smiled at him and leaned over to grip his shoulder and guide his arm around her waist painlessly.

It was just as slow for Obito to go down with help, but much less painful, having something to hold on to at both sides. So few people in Obito’s life were prepared to let her go at her own speed, especially Shinobi who could so easily and quickly carry her where they thought she should be.

“I thought you had a mission today.” She said quietly, when they paused halfway down.

“I do, but we’re waiting for the Hokage to officially sign off on it. He and Jiraiya are locked in his office arguing about something.” Kakashi looked at her, “You wouldn’t have any idea why, would you?”

Obito put on her best confused look. “Me? Be a reason for the Hokage and a member of the Sannin to argue? Why would you think such a thing?”

Kakashi didn’t dignify that with a response, just continuing to let her lean on him even when they reached the bottom of the staircase. He walked her towards the side room Obito had used to sew on ANBU uniforms before, and he shut the door behind them. The comfy armchair Yuugao had taken from another room was still there and Obito collapsed into it with relief.
“You do know Jiraiya just about attacked Danzo in a council meeting yesterday?” Kakashi said cautiously. “Called him out over Root and demanded to know what he thought he was doing sending shinobi on un-sanctioned suicide missions.”

“Really,” Obito bit down her smirk at the thought of someone finally physically fighting Danzo. “And how did Danzo respond? Did he give that speech about Roots in the darkness and strength of the trees? Did Jiraiya hit him? Please tell me he hit him!”

“Obito.” Kakashi frowned at her, “One of our highest-ranking shinobi fighting with a village elder is not something to smile about.”

Obito forced her smile into a serious look.

Kakashi was all seriousness. “Because when he demanded Root be banned he looked like an idiot in front of the council when the Hokage told him it had already been dealt with.”

“Oh,” Obito slumped back, “Right. Did that actually happen in the end? I thought only Tenzo joined the real ANBU, not the rest of them too…”

Kakashi waved a hand, “That’s not the point. The point was Jiraiya challenged Danzo and the Hokage defended him. It looks like Danzo has more power than Jiraiya, unless our mission is a resounding success.”

“And this mission would be…?”

“Classified.” Kakashi looked pensive. “…and unpleasant. Doing messy things for the greater good of the village. It’s to do with the Kumo issue.”

“I did see Hizashi Hyuuga, he said he was going on a mission for the same reason. Are you all going together?”

Both Kakashi’s grey eye and back eye widened. “You know Hizashi?”

“His wife has been my physical therapist for the past three years. She’s most of the reason I got movement back in all my fingers.” Obito said brightly, waving her hand at him. “They have a four-year-old son. Neji.”

Kakashi looked like someone punched him in the clavicle. “That’s… not ideal.”

“What?” Obito tilted her head. “I thought you were going to fix things with Kumo. Why is it not good that I know Hizashi?”

“Because-“ Kakashi caught himself and sighed. “We did say no more lies, didn’t we?”

“Well yes, but I can understand if it’s classified information. I don’t want you to risk your rank just because I’m curious. But Hizashi is going to be alright, isn’t he?” Seeing him in the waiting room had made Obito feel vaguely uneasy, like she was missing a vital part of a fuuinjutsu sequence.

“It’s a dangerous mission, I can’t say that any of us will come back alive-“

“You have to!” Obito blurted out and stood to grab at Kakashi’s arm. “You have to come back to me, alright? That’s not negotiable. You will be alright, and you will come back. Got it?”

Kakashi stared at her. Obito awkwardly let go and looked away, embarrassed by her sudden outburst. It was stupid to demand an ANBU captain return from a mission unharmed, their work
revolved around taking the most deadly of missions. She looked like an ignorant civilian reacting belatedly to the fact that Kakashi did dangerous work. “I mean,” Obito coughed, staring out of the closed window. “Just don’t take any unnecessary risks, without thinking them through… maybe?” she was surprised by the hand gently put to her cheek and turned her head to look at the solemn Kakashi.

“I don’t think it’s fair for you to ask me not to take unnecessary risks when your entire life is a series of risks you unthinkingly took.” He said with slight amusement.

“That’s not true.” Obito frowned. “Stuff just happens, and I react, I don’t actively go looking for trouble.” Except the time she hunted for Naruto… and maybe the whole Suna incident…and possibly when she charged in to fight those kidnappers… but seriously, people had been in danger, what else was she supposed to have done?

“Right.” Kakashi brushed his thumb over the start of the scar that cut into her lower lip. “One of the last lessons Minato gave me, was that being an adult meant acting, not just reacting.”

Obito turned away from his touch, though it was a very pleasant sensation. “I am not an adult. I won’t be one officially until I’m twenty or married.” The fact was still a bitter point to her.

“I’ve been an adult legally since I was six.” Kakashi reminded her softly. “Such things are meaningless. Minato’s point was: if you are only reacting to events and people around you, then you have no true control over your own fate. You can’t say that you are not to blame for events when you’re forever responding to other’s actions. You have to take control and act for yourself, before you get stuck in a risk of someone else’s making…”

“Says the man under the direct control of the Hokage, in the organization with the highest fatality rate.” Obito pointed out gruffly. Obito totally had control over her life… apart from what her clan and the village dictated.

“I have taken every precaution I can to minimise the risks I take. I made the decision to apply for ANBU captain when I knew I was ready, to pick my own team after months of consideration, and I have even turned down missions when I have deemed them unsuited for our strengths. I let you sew this seal on me and struggled to improve my control over the eye because you felt it could be better. I’m going on this mission with all the facts and will act in the best possible manner to maximise everyone’s survival. You-“ Kakashi looked at her sternly. “have never paused to consider anything but feelings before charging into a situation headfirst.”

Obito opened her mouth to object.

“-and often that’s been a good thing. You’ve always had a good grasp on how people feel, and understanding enough, to get them to cooperate with you.”

Obito closed her mouth.

“But you have to start noticing when people are manipulating you. And you have to think before you cause incidents like Jiraiya yelling at the Hokage in front of the council and creating a public fission between them.”

“What was I supposed to do?” Obito demanded. “Jiraiya lied to my face about Naruto not having anyone responsible for him. And I didn’t charge off to find him when I found out he was hiding the fact that he was Naruto’s Godfather. Jiraiya came to me and was just so…” Obito waved her hand, “So smug and at ease, like it didn’t matter that his Godson was living an unloved life with no one to look after him. I told him about Danzo tricking me into going to Suna so Jiraiya would finally stop
accepting the Hokage’s word that everything was fine and start looking into matters for himself!”

“But how is Jiraiya and the Hokage fighting improving things for Naruto, Obito?” demanded Kakashi. “How is his life made better by two powerful people, who in their own way protect him, being at odds with each other? What were you hoping for when you confronted Jiraiya? That he’d magically change into a fatherly person and settle down to raise Naruto? That he’d wave a hand and a rainfall of toads would crush anyone mistreating him?”

Obito let her hands and shoulders drop and stared down at the wooden floor. She hadn’t thought about that, what would happen next. She just wanted Jiraiya to look back on his actions and see how wrong he was, not what he would do about it. She had just wanted Jiraiya to stop blindly doing what he was told, not to start openly arguing with the Hokage. “I just wanted him to be better.” Obito said quietly. “I wanted him to be the person I thought he was, the brave wise shinobi I saw him as when I was young.” She swallowed. “And I wanted to hurt him. Because he hurt me, by not being what I wanted.” She raised her head and tried to stand up straight. “But if I take back what I said to Jiraiya, or in anyway seem regretful, won’t he just take that as an excuse to ignore what I said?”

Kakashi had no answer for her.

Obito sank down into the armchair again and looked up with a serious expression. “Jiraiya is the last loyal member of our Sannin and student of the third Hokage. He’s a grown man, he should know what’s going on in the village, not off creeping out girls.” She felt her emotions rise, indignation carrying on her rant. “I mean, everyone keeps telling me what to do, that I have to be responsible, but Jiraiya? He runs around writing filth for years, has no idea what’s going on in the village, despite being our highest ranking shinobi. He should be questioning the Hokage’s decisions, not mindlessly obeying them! You say I keep reacting to things, but Jiraiya isn’t even doing that much, he’s just mindlessly obeying his orders in between perv ing at bathhouses and writing books about it!” She sank back against the back of her chair with a disgusted look.

Kakashi raised a single eyebrow.

“What?” Obito snapped.

“I’m just… interested to see you’re capable of holding a grudge against anyone. You let your family walk all over you but it’s Jiraiya you’re angry with.”

“Because I expected better from him. My family have always treated me the same, but Jiraiya acted like he was the perfect shinobi, doing everything he could to serve the village. When in reality he does as he’s told and not a thing more, in spite of the promises and responsibilities he should be undertaking.” Obito folder her arms and frowned. “I fail to see how Naruto could be in a worse situation if Jiraiya finally takes an interest in him and in what Danzo’s up to. The whole point of Hokage’s students and teammates having votes in the council is so someone can help them make balanced decisions. I don’t think Danzo and the Hokage talk at all, they just each do their own thing.”

Kakashi looked worried. “You’re not going to apologise?”

“That would be reacting.” Obito said sweetly. “And you asked me to stop letting other people control my actions. Jiraiya throwing a tantrum isn’t convincing me to change my mind.”

Kakashi huffed. “So I get to spend the next month with a sulking Toad Sage?”

Obito frowned up at him. Then slowly beckoned him over and to lean down. When he cautiously did so, she pressed a hand over the chakra storage seal at the top of his cheek. “Sorry. I’ll make it up
to you.” Gently she channeled her chakra into the seal, providing him with more chakra to control the Sharingan above the seal.

“That would be nice.” Cautiously Kakashi put his hand over hers on his cheek and leaned in closer, kneeling down. Obito let him rest his head against her breastbone, shoulders relaxing as her free arm wrapped around him.

“I’m serious about you being careful out there.” She muttered. “You’re not expendable. You’re important.”

“Alright,” Kakashi sighed. “I’ll remember that.”

*

Jiraiya glared out at the calm river. Even with the strong current pulling the boat along, the water was too still for his liking. There should be waves and wind, a physical manifestation of the emotions and thoughts swirling in his head. Around him the ANBU team still held themselves at stoic attention, though they were all dressed as ordinary Chuunin and Jounin. Not even the Hyuuga, replacing the youngest member of the team, showed any sign of temper or sadness, and just stared down at his hands.

Only Dog-brat was relaxed, seated on the bow of the ship and engrossed in a book. But then, he had re-appeared with his chakra seal filled to the brim and its threads completely invisible, which meant he had spent his last moments home with Orange-brat. Jiraiya would have given almost anything to have had one of his Genin teammates wave him off on a mission with a smile and well wishes.

Instead he had the duty of hunting down one of them and threatening her with treason if she didn’t obey the orders their very angry teacher had sent. Hiruzen-sensei had looked so betrayed when Jiraiya accused Danzo of foul play, as if it were Orochimaru all over again. Jiraiya regretted his impulsive actions even as he had done them, but he hadn’t had the courage to apologise in public or in private afterwards.

Jiraiya wished for the thousandth time Minato was still here, that he could go back in time and take his place sealing the Kyuubi. Minato was Jiraiya’s greatest achievement and Jiraiya still didn’t know how much of it had been his own doing. Minato would know how to deal with Danzo, with Tsunade and the Kumo situation, and Obito. Jiraiya could die in peace, having found the Child of the Prophecy, and having fulfilled the prophecy he had dedicated his life to. He wouldn’t have to deal with the complicated politics of Jinchuuriki raising and Sharingan guarding. He wouldn’t have to face the fact that every student he ever taught was dead, save an angry young woman demanding he end her apprenticeship. Everyone in his life was angry with Jiraiya at the moment.

At least Dog-brat seemed alright now, Jiraiya thought as he looked over again at the reading Kakashi. Less stoic and miserable, more at peace with himself even on such a depressing mission.

“Good book there, Brat? Is it one of mine?” Jiraiya called over.

“In a manner of speaking.” Kakashi raised the cover so Jiraiya could read the title. “I’ll lend it to you once I’m done.”

Come and Go-away Again? Interesting title, Jiraiya thought as he settled back down next to the morose Hyuuga. Something to look forward to while they carried out this truly awful mission.

*

“I need a place to hide,” Obito told Yashino Uchiha bursting into his small walled garden a day later.
“I can’t take one more discussion over food or table settings. I will set the charts on fire and Auntie will make me redo them all night-”

“Oh dear,” Yashino looked up from where he was slowly putting on his shoes with arthritic fingers. “That sounds serious. Who’s watching Kamo?” His usual straw hat on, hiding his short grey hair and acid marked forehead.

“He’s with Akari, he’s having a good day so they’re going over his plants and what he wants to do with them. I should be with him, not wasting time with stupid party plans.” Obito huffed and belatedly wrapped her beloved patchwork scarf around her shoulders, the fabric from various clothing Team Seven had once worn making a warm colourful shawl.

“Isn’t it better you get your duties over with, then you can spend time as you like?” Yashino asked patiently.

“No, because then Auntie will think up something else for us to do!” Obito exclaimed.

Yashino considered her for a moment then broke into a wide smile, his deep eye bags blending into his laughter lines. “Well, then you had better come with me and see how young Anko is doing with her summoning. I’m meeting her and Mitsubachi at Training Field Thirty-Eight. They’d love to see you.”

Obito grinned back at that thought. Getting out into the less urban areas of Konoha was a rare treat. She happily agreed and followed her unofficial uncle out of the compound, letting him deal with the guard’s objections to two non-shinobi leaving for the day.

Once they were away from the narrow streets and on a dusty path winding between fields, Obito finally managed to ask a question she had had on her mind for a while.

“Uncle… ” she said hesitantly, to the old man who was barely a distant cousin to her by blood. “You and Grand Mitsubachi. You’ve always been very close to them. I wanted to ask you about that—”

Yashino smiled at her mischievously. “Well you see, when a man loves another person very very much—”

“No.” Obito quickly cut off that embarrassing talk. “No. I worked that part out already, thank-you, I know you and they have been together for years, I just wondered… why you never married them?”

“Huh,” Yashino lost his smile to look at her considering, “That’s an interesting question to ask.”

“I always wondered when I was young.” Obito admitted. “But Grandma told me it was rude for children to ask such questions. Any idiot could see you loved each other. But you were married to Auntie Tayuka and she had your kids—”

“Only Yashiro is really mine,” Yashino interrupted. “I love all three of them of course, but I only sired Yoshiro to shut the elders up. I was surprised how much I enjoyed being a father, and I was perfectly happy when Tayuka wanted to have more, and allowed me to act as father to them. But I couldn’t bring myself to hurt Mitsubachi more than I had, by conceiving them too.”

“But after they grew up, Auntie Tayuka wouldn’t have minded if you left her and married Mitsubachi instead. You were with them first, weren’t you?”

Yashino sighed and looked ahead, gazing out over the weed covered fields, left to rest until the next growing season. “When you ask it like that, it seems so simple, but few things in life are uncomplicated. I could never bring myself to demand Mitsubachi to leave their clan and hives to be
my kept spouse. I knew I would never be able to do the same for them, leave my family and children
to become an Aburame. We had months alone together on missions before and during the war, and
Tayuka knew all about them when she asked me to marry her. It seemed like the perfect solution.”
Yashino looked back at Obito, his lined face regretful. “I know now it caused Mitsubachi pain,
agreeing to share me, more than they will ever admit. But,” Yashino shrugged. “My Mitsu could
never bear to make a scene. And it worked out alright, for the most part.”

He looked back out to the horizon. Obito frowned to herself, feeling helpless dissatisfied with his
answer. The story of a lifetime of love should not be so mundane.

“Did,” She asked hesitantly. “Did you ever worry the clans would make you break it off?”

“We spent nights lying awake plotting what to do if they did.” Yashino smiled wryly. “How we’d
run away together to the Temples and be married by a single priest at dawn. How’d we hide in the
Forest of Death until three days passed and neither clan could make the marriage void. We’d take a
joint assignment to Kusa and come back years later when all the elders gave up and begged us to
return and teach our amazing new techniques with them.

Obito smiled at the warmth in his recollections.

“Then one of the Akimichi tried to run off with a Hyuuga, one of the main house ones.” Yashino’s
voice changed its tone. “They stoned her in the centre square and he was forced to watch and then be
blinded. My mother didn’t say a word to me during the stoning, just kept a tight grip on my hair and
made sure I watched everything. Mitsubachi’s grandmother did the same for them.” Yashino smiled,
a dark slit of teeth that did not belong on his face. “I think I knew then, that I would never activate
my Sharingan, if the loss of that dream didn’t cause enough despair.”

Obito fought to keep her face clear of her panic. “I- I thought the Akimichi were the nice clan!”

“No clan manages to become one of the four noble families by being nice.” Yashino told her sadly.
“It might have been the unrest at the time, the second war was at our doorstep, Konoha couldn’t
afford to show weakness when we were about to be sieged by Iwa and Kumo. But I never dared
speak of marriage with Mitsubachi again and they felt the same.” He smiled gently at Obito’s shock.

“Don’t fear, Surprising One, we’ve lived a long happy life together, despite it all. What are a few
compromises to fifty years of love?”

Obito shuddered, despite her warm clothing and the good weather. She was really sorry she asked.

* *

Unlike some non-gendered people Obito had met, it had always seemed apparent that tall, deep
voiced Mitsubachi was male. But the Aburame had always addressed themselves as they and them,
and they had bee hives all over Konoha they could partly communicate with to back up the
argument, so no one really fought them on the subject. Obito, who clung to her boy’s name and
insisted that she had been a boy during the war, not a girl pretending, but a real boy, and now she
was a real girl… didn’t really see the problem. Surely a person would be the best judge on what their
own gender was or wasn’t?

Mitsubachi was watching Anko doing her warm up exercises, hampered by a borrowed thick cloak
over her usual lightweight clothing. Obito was amused to see Yashino had brought breakfast for both
Mitsubachi and Anko, withholding a snack bar as a treat until Anko finished eating her apple and
drink. Seeing Yashino and Mitsubachi fuss over Anko made some of the ill feeling in her stomach
lessen. It seemed they might still manage to raise a child together, despite the manipulations of both
While they were preoccupied, Obito reached up to her patchwork scarf and let her fingers run over the bit of material that had come from Kakashi’s old training shirt. Her vague hopes of finding a solution to juggling her love and her clan were crushed by Yashino’s talk. Now she was just hyper aware of how much trouble she could get into, if anyone else found out about her and Kakashi.

“Obito!” Anko called for her attention and struck a triumphant pose. “Guess who is being considered for solo B-rank missions again.” She pointed to herself. “I’m up for evaluation next week. I got the all clear from T&I!”

“That’s lovely, but don’t get too ahead of yourself.” Yashino warned her as Mitsubachi’s kikaichu gathered up the last of the fruit juice on his hands. “The council are the real challenge here. They never let go of a past mistake or bad association, even if the person is blameless.” He quickly added at the tensing of Anko’s lips.

“You have the talent to be a Jounin,” Mitsubachi added, laying a hand on Yashino’s to take back their kikaichu. “All you have to do is prove your work is to the council’s benefit, and Konoha’s. Show us what you can do and we’ll help you work out how to display it in the best light.”

“Right,” Anko nodded, then with a grin she used doton jutsu to create a mud bench. “You should take a seat then, while I amaze you with my progress.”

Obito sat down as well and firmly tucked away her jealousy. If anyone deserved to be made a Jounin at sixteen it was Anko. She had always been talented, that was what led Orochimaru to selected her for his Genin team. She had once been thought of as a future Hokage candidate, the next Hiruzen Sarutobi.

Now Anko had to fight to prove her right for B-rank missions. Like an outsider come to the Academy late in childhood and whose loyalty was questionable. All because the teacher the village has entrusted her to had turned out to be a traitorous monster.

Obito clenched her jaw and made herself smile and cheer when Anko ran through set after set of fighting styles, jutsu after jutsu using earth and wind. When Anko wrapped up her demonstration by summoning a millipede double her size and coaxing it to shoot a leg off and hit a distant tree, Obito did cheer sincerely, wildly proud of Anko’s accomplishments. No one had expected Anko to recover from the betrayal of her teacher, and few wanted her to. But here she was throwing away Orochimaru’s influence to master a whole new animal summon. One that could throw detachable poisoned legs at people.

Obito opened her mouth.

“No, you cannot turn your prosthetic into a poisoned weapon.” Yashino responded before she could start asking.

“How did you know-“

“Because that’s what I would have wanted if I were you.” He said with a fond pat of her knee.

“Uchihas,” Mitsubachi sighed to themself.

“And now, for her final throw, four targets at once!” Anko announced, readying her senbon while her millipede adjusted itself to lift it’s back over its head and aim at the four trees. “Fire at will Miri.”

Together the kunoichi and summon hit every one of their targets. Miri flung its back legs
triumphantly, and another set of detachable pincer legs went flying backwards.

“Down!” Yelled Yashino, flinging up his arms to cover Obito (who was already on the ground covering her head) and Mitsubachi, whose kikaichu buzzed angrily, swarming up from their coat to form a defence.

But all their efforts were unnecessary as the legs flew harmlessly over their head and into the clump of trees behind them. One leg fell into the branches of a tall yellow wood. The other leg just missed hitting a smaller tree. Because the tree very elegantly tilted itself out of the way.

“What the?” Anko frowned and turned to look at her audience. “Did one of you do that?”

Mitsubachi tilted their head, a few kikaichu flying back under their shirt collar. “The swarm says there is a child in that tree.”

“What?” Yashino sprang up, sai blades appearing out from under his long coat sleeves, ready to fight. “A genjutsu of some kind?”

“No love, it’s real tree. The bees say it wasn’t there an hour ago.”

“That’s not normal…” Anko refilled her hand with senbon. “Is it?” She looked at the elders for confirmation.

“Ummm…” Obito covered her left eye, activating her original Sharingan on its own. “I think I know who that is, but you have all got to promise me not to make a big deal about it…”

*

Mitsubachi alone managed to stay calm when a small boy with long brown hair and big blank eyes was coaxed out of his self-grown tree by Obito and brought over to be introduced. Without his ANBU mask or even his head guard Obito was horribly reminded that Tenzo was younger than Shisui.

“I knew it! I knew it! I knew those Senju were holding back on us! Like they would have ever really let the Mokuton die out!” Yashino went into full anti-Senju conspiracy talk, proving that even the most rational of Uchiha was vulnerable to clan prejudice.

“Who sent you! Why are you spying on me! I didn’t do anything!” Anko defended herself, half hiding behind the considering Mitsubachi. Her millipede summon had been dismissed when Obito had walked back with the unthreatening looking Tenzo.

Tenzo, full out hiding behind Obito with just his head peering out, just stared back at them. Obito was at a loss as to how to explain anything to anyone without revealing more than she should.

After a moment of quiet considering, Mitsubachi sat down again and pulled Yashino down next to them. “I had heard rumours, but I couldn’t bring myself to believe.” They said calmly. “My own clan took part on the experiments years ago, trying to recreate the Mokuton but they all failed. I thought the experiments had been ended. Are you the only one?”

Tenzo looked up at Obito. Obito ruthlessly reminded herself that this was an ANBU agent, not one of her little cousins with a bad test score needing a hug. She stepped away, forcing Tenzo to face Mitsubachi directly.

Tenzo pulled himself up into a formal stance, as if giving an official report. “There were sixty. But now there’s one. Me.” Tenzo clarified, looking straight ahead to avoid eye contact. “I’m the only
“And why were you spying on me!” Anko demanded, brisling with indignation. “Who sent you?”

Tenzo opened his mouth to answer, then stopped, surprise on his face. “No one did.” He said quietly amazed. “I came here because I wanted to.” He turned to look at Obito for reassurance.

“Ah ha!” Yashino pointed a finger accusingly. “You see, you see how deep the Senju cunning goes! Even the adopted children automatically spy on us!”

“Yashino, please remember your blood pressure.” Mitsubachi said blandly. “You sound just like your mother.” They turned to look at Obito, eyebrows raised over their sunglasses. “But I am interested to know how you two know each other…”

Obito squirmed.

“That’s classified.” Tenzo answered by route. “Information only authorised by my squad captain or Lord Third.”

“And your captain is?” Mitsubachi asked patiently.

Obito braced herself. Once Kakashi’s came out it was all over for her. Her being on familiar terms with Kakashi’s ANBU squad meant Yashino would know she was in close contact with him. Add to that her questions on the walk over, the suspicions Ranma had over her disappearance a week ago and how important it was she marry within clan… Obito’s few freedoms were gone. Her heart pounded in her ribcage, her thoughts ran in circles, unable to think of a way out of this.

If they confine me again, I’ll leave. She thought traitorously. I won’t survive trapped in the Compound again. They don’t know I can slip out the wall seals, I’ll take a bag and-

“What did you say?”

“My captain’s identity is classified,” Tenzo repeated.

Obito was just as surprised as Yashino looked. She really had thought that had been the end… and she had been planning to escape. Weird. That her first plan of action was to run from her family.

“Child, the Jounin-sensei of Genin are not classified.” Mitsubachi explained slowly. “I know you must feel very grown-up with your headband, but you are a Genin and we have a duty to make sure your teacher knows what you get up to in your free time.” Mitsubachi gestured to the trees covered in senbon and poisoned legs. “What if you had been hit or injured? A new Genin should know training ground safety practises.”

They thought Tenzo was a Genin, Obito realised. Of course they did, Tenzo looked younger than twelve, no one would automatically think him an ANBU member.

Tenzo was frowning and looked about to argue. Obito hit his arm gently with her knuckles, Kakashi’s default means of expressing affection with his team.

“I know his teacher! One of the Inuzuka who’s always in everyone’s business!” Obito smiled and put an arm around Tenzo’s shoulders once he was looking at her. “She probably set all three of her students ‘information gathering’ missions again. I’ll take him back to her and have a quiet word about privacy and training ground safety!” She turned around and lead Tenzo away back towards the village proper. “Bye Anko. Impressive work with the training posts, but maybe work on your doton a bit more. Your last mud wall was flakey!” Obito walked fast and didn’t look behind at Anko’s
squark of indignation or Yashino’s call for her to go straight back home afterwards.

“What are you doing here?” Obito hissed as soon as they were out of sight, “I thought the team had some important long-term mission!

“They do.” Tenzo looked miserable. “I had to stay behind. I’m a liability.” he intoned like it was a curse.

Obito, familiar in the way some children interpreted everything as a personal criticism looked skeptical. “Who said that and is that how they actually said it?”

“The Hokage said it, said my identity can’t be known outside of the village and I had to stay behind.” Tenzo looked up at Obito sadly. “Captain said not to take it personally, and I could go visit you if I ran out of things to do.”

Thanks for the warning Kakashi, Obito thought. Good to know I had another emotionally lost genius to worry about, one that’s fresh out of a brainwashing club!

“Alright then, let’s just hope those three back there keep their mouths shut about you. So, what have you been up to?” Obito turned left at a fork in the dirt road avoiding the direct route to the heart of the village. She didn’t want too many people seeing her with an unfamiliar child.

“I trained.” Tenzo said seriously. “I did all my individual training and Team 14 let me join their team training and then I worked on my Mokuton. I made myself a bed and desk and a chair for my dorm room!” he looked up at her anxiously for approval, picking at the folded up cuffs of his shirt.

“That’s… nice.” Dorm room. He was lodging in the ANBU barracks then. No chance of him associating with anyone outside of the organization. And it must all seem completely normal after Orochimaru’s labs (Kakashi had nightmares about those labs, so frequently that Obito got them as well via the strangeness that was a sharing a pair of Sharingan) and Root.

Obito had an overpowering urge to pick up Tenzo and take him home to give to Granny Ranma. She was just as manipulative and controlling as Danzo but Ranma Uchiha had raised Shisui and kept him sane and human-like in the wake of his traumatic rise through the ranks during the war. Ranma would feed Tenzo comfort food and talk him through his emotions and know not to leave him to his own devices when his entire support group was out of the village.

“Please tell me you know how to read.” Obito finally asked, when she finally got a grip of her anger.

“Panda was helping me improve. But the only books I can find in the dorm are-.” he frowned, not willing to voice the complaint on his face. “-grown up books.” Tenzo finally finished looking embarrassed.

“Of course they were… library card. The least they could have done is give you a damn library card,” Obito muttered to herself as they reached the Eastern Quarters, a part of the village she was unlikely to encounter either her family or anyone who knew about Tenzo. “Let’s get something to eat while I work out how to get an undocumented ANBU a children’s library card.”

Various refugee groups over the years had settled in this part of Konoha, from Rin’s people from River Country to various individuals from Rice and Water. The main population group was still the descendants of Uzushio, and Obito had spent some time in the area on the lookout for new fuuinjutsu texts and random bits of knowledge. For all they claimed that the bulk of the Uzushio skills had been lost with the fall of their village, Obito had seen many minor seals and fragments of skills. Nothing worthwhile to a true fuuinjutsu master, but Obito liked to experiment with her sewing seals, and try
out anything new she spotted around the village.

The Eastern Quarters also had various cheap eateries so Obito could afford to let Tenzo try out a bunch of different foods. Food, books and company, that was all she could do for him at the moment.

Obito’s favorite restaurant that month, the one with the best spicy seafood, was as loud and crowded as always. No one turned a hair when Obito sat down at one of the communal tables, patted the space next to her for Tenzo to join and dropped her cash into the tall narrow glass vase in the centre. The sound of the coins falling against the curved sides of the vase signaled she had paid enough for two people. Without a break in their conversation a woman at the head of the table passed two plates down the table along with two mismatched glasses already full of water.

Thus passed a pleasant half hour as Obito coaxed Tenzo to try the various dishes covering the table, while indulging in her love of all things spiced. Once Tenzo found something he liked she turned her ear to the conversation at the table.

“-they’re just a bunch of kids, how much trouble could they get up to? It’s peacetime, the laws are relaxed.”

“They took my grandfather’s collection of hair pins. And Great-Aunt’s travel desk. The one I could never unlock. What if she worked out how to open them and found scrolls in them?”

“I don’t care how much trouble they’ve caused in the past, when a group of children go missing for three days you start to look for them-”

“I panicked when I heard how many were gone, I couldn’t leave it to the Rockery to sort out. I tried to go to the police and the Uchiha waved me off, said it wasn’t worth the trouble of a police report!”

“Really? I went myself and they took down everything I could tell them.”

“Probably forgot about it the second you left. Those Uchiha do nothing unless it’s a shinobi doing the asking. You’re better off approaching the Rockery again.”

“I thought the disappearances had stopped, I never heard of so many go missing at the same time. And they’re all too old to be... you know- sacrifices .”

“I just want someone to look over the mess Karei left behind and tell me if I need to panic. If they’re just holed up somewhere complaining and smoking I wouldn’t care.”

“I’d pay good money to get an Uchiha over here to track my baby down.”

“Well,” Obito said, leaning across the table to get at the crayfish. “I don’t know about good money. But I’m an Uchiha and I’ll have a look for your kids if someone gets me more of the seaweed dumplings.”

Tenzo choked on his first bite of the squid. Obito patted him on the back as the table lapsed into silence, everyone noticing them for the first time. Various tanned faces turned white, matching the linen clothing they wore and making their bright coloured hair stand out even further.

“What?” Obito held a glass to Tenzo’s mouth once he had cleared his throat. “I am an Uchiha, honest.” She waved at the Uchiwa partly visible under her scarf. “What could it hurt? *
Hours later, after many questions and conversations, the discovery of a conspiracy to flee Konoha to start a new Uzushiogakure with a bunch of impressionable youths and old Fuuinjutsu; ending with tracking down the group at the furthest boundary wall of Konoha, Obito reconsidered her words.

“Okay,” she whispered as a newcomer to the group shed his disguise and revealed himself to be with the sole survivor of the Iwa group that had tried to kidnap Obito months ago. He was embraced by various Uzushiogakure refugees, calling him a fellow Son of the Sea. “There could be some hurt in this.”

Tenzo, who had gotten more and more exasperated as the had situation escalated, gave her an outright sarcastic response of: “No? Really?” as he gestured to themselves, hiding in a painfully spiky bush and still out of breath from their mad dash to the very outskirts of the village right by the most deserted part of Konoha’s Wall. Obito and Tenzo were worn out from a day of sticking their noses into places no one wanted them, being sent in circles while they pieced together the plans of the self-taught fuuinjutsu master and would-be Kage of a new Uzushiogakure.

Obito shifted and carefully untangled her scarf from the woody bush. “I’m sorry I dragged you into this but maybe you should go for help. I’ll keep watch.”

“I’m ANBU, I’ll keep watch and you go somewhere safe-”

“Nope.” Obito patted her prosthetic leg. “I’ve reached my limit for walking today, I’m not sure how I’ll get home. I’d rather stay in one spot. You go.”

“Or-” came a voice above them and Obito hissed and ducked down while Tenzo formed a wooden staff defensively. “We can all leave and you can explain how you interpreted ‘go straight home’ as ‘wonder around the village for hours then end up a stone’s throw from the village border?” Mitsubachi frowned down at them from a tree branch while Yashino spoke next to them. A small kikaichu took flight from Obito’s hair and landed neatly on Mitsubachi’s outstretched hand.

“I can explain,” hissed Obito, looking over to where the group were still talking animatedly. “Just stay out of sight, those two men are bad news. That one in the jumpsuit was part of the group that killed Ema and kidnapped me months ago, and the one with the blue robes wants to rebuild Uzushiogakure with himself as the Kage. All those kids have been tricked into stealing their families’ old weapons and fuuinjutsu scrolls. ”

“Really Obito,” Yashino knelt down on the branch, hissing at the stretch of his old leg joints. “You come up with the craziest stories. There are barely a dozen shinobi in the ranks with Uzushio blood these days, and their culture has all but been wiped out. Why would such a large group of civilians abandon the safety of a Great Village for a half-remembered homeland?”

Obito bit her tongue at the doubt aimed at her, hurt by Yashino’s disbelief. And surprised at his lack of knowledge. The Uzushio quarters was a thriving mini-village and though few of its residents ventured into the rest of the village and even less put their children in the Academy, they still had many people who straddled the line between shinobi and civilian, learning staff and spear fighting, chakra control for their large reserves and many sealing techniques passed down through family lines. It wasn’t secret knowledge, anyone could wonder though the East Quarters and see the people, feel their controlled chakra and use of simple seals all over the place. Why was Yashino doubting her word?

“Yashino-” said Mitsubachi. “They do seem to be doing something with the Wall’s defences. I suggest we stop them first and discuss their motivations later.”

“I’m not letting Obito out of my sight again.” Yashino said and used shunshin to get to the ground and take a firm grasp of her arm. “I vouched for you at the Compound Gates, when everyone knew...
you were wanted at home. The branch heads can’t do anything to me but they can make my children suffer for my disobedience if you get hurt.” He grabbed Tenzo with his other hand and pulled him back. “And it’s past time you got home young man, before your clan restarts the feud.” Tenzo blinked in surprise, allowing himself to be forced back a few steps.

“Uncle! Please just listen to me!” Hised Obito as he dragged her out of the bushes. “I can’t be seen by that man!”

But it was too late, the entire group had seen them approaching.

*

Of course the whole situation dissolved into a fight. Of course it did. When had anything in Obito’s life ever ended in reasonable discussion and hugs, instead of battle and bloodshed?

“I don’t know what’s going on,” said Mitsubachi calmly, as if their bugs weren’t forming an angry swarm above his head. As if they and Yoshino hadn’t just dodged a set of paper bombs. “But I must ask you to stop attacking us and remain here until the proper authorities arrive to question us all. We are too near the wall for any kind of seal training or petty fighting.”

Shiokaze, the only adult of the Uzushio group, had a scroll open on the ground before him and his bleeding hand indicated he was about to activate old fuuinjutsu. “Typical Konoha, poking their noses into things that do not concern them,” he hissed hefting his walking stick like a club in his uninjured hand.

“Young companion has been accused of attempting to kidnap an Uchiha. We need to bring you all in for questioning. It wouldn’t take long.” Mitsubachi calmly continued.

“The Uchiha lies.” The kidnapper said, more to the rest of his group than the Aburame. “I am a loyal Son of the Sea and I only sought to capture the evil Uchiha who had stolen my family’s sacred sealing techniques!” He pointed dramatically at Obito, who deeply regretted not letting Kakashi kill him.

“I believe you, Isubi,” Shiokaze said comfortingly. “Everyone knows the Uchiha take whatever skills they fancy without earning them.” The youths behind him nodded at this, losing their uncertainty. “I’m not surprised the Uchiha have starting stealing fuuinjutsu, when everyone knows they were the cause of the Kyuubi attack.” Shiokaze continued lofty. The Uzushio youth booed and hissed, readying themselves for a fight.

“Wait, what?” asked Obito softly, but her voice was lost in the chaos.

“Loyal members of Uzushiogakure,” cried Shiokaze, “This is an opportunity sent down by the Sea herself. Seize the Uchiha and we will bring them to Ame to face judgment by the last true Uzumaki!”

His followers cheered.

“YOU’LL NEVER TAKE ME ALIVE!” Yelled Yashino pulling out two sai.

There was an awkward pause.

“I meant the young Uchiha, not the ancient fool!” Shiokaze clarified.

“Well, now someone has to die.” Muttered Yashino and charged forward to meet Isubi in a clash of blades.
“I think you’re still young and virile,” Mitsubachi said loyally, following after him and dodging shuriken to get closer to Shiokaze.

Mitsubachi and Yashino had been fighting together for over fifty years. Even retired and each with a long list of typical old-age complaints, they still managed to have the upper hand against one escaped prisoner suffering from a long incarceration and mild torturing, and one self trained fuuinjutsu master. It was easy for Mitsubachi and Yashino to herd them away from the rest of the group.

Obito got to face down a bunch of inexperienced half-trained Uzushio brats, most a bit older than her. This did not stop her from folding her arms and giving them all her best Unimpressed Auntie look. Finally, people she could yell at.

“And just what do you all think you’re doing?” she demanded, making some of them lower their sticks and scrolls guiltily. “Your families are worried sick. The Rockery is searching the village for you, breaking years of treaties and alliances for the slightest trace of you. Do you honestly think a self-trained sealing user will help you rebuild Uzushiogakure?”

“He will too!” A purple haired boy yelled, clutching a fish-gutting knife. “Shiokaze’s trained for years to do this! He’s got a great plan to get us to Ame safely and they have allies all over the land. Shiokaze is doing what our families are too afraid to do, reclaiming our birthright!”

“Sure, that’s why most of you are holding your scrolls upside down.” Obito said, unimpressed. “And why you all ran away without telling your families, because you knew they’d tell what utter stupidity this entire plan is.” she lowered her voice so the four adults fighting to the side of them couldn’t hear. “Do you even know what happened to your people outside of Konoha?”

“We’ve seen what happens to our people in Konoha!” A red-haired girl (Gyosan, who had her father’s hair, who hadn’t been out fishing in two days, too worried about his eldest to earn a day’s wage) put a hand to her stomach. “I’m not risking that happen to my baby in a few years, stolen from his bed and told not to look for him. And if not that then where do you think they’ll look when the current vessel finally dies of neglect?”

Obito’s response caught in her throat. “I- that’s not-” she couldn’t form a response to that revelation. She hadn’t seen the slightest hint any Uzu decedents knew anything about Naruto’s existence. Or of the burden he carried. Gyosan had hair the same shade as Kushina, though cut in a short bob and with darker skin than Naruto’s mother. Her determined scowl was the same as Kushina though, when nothing Minato said could change her mind.

The tallest of the Uzushio boys attacking her was almost a relief, sparing Obito the need to come up with an answer. The boy was strong but unpractised and fell to his knees when Obito twisted one of his fingers. A burst of fire-breath made the next two opponents back off, though the Gyosan jumped through the end of it and landed a powerful kick to Obito’s chest, knocking her down.

“I don’t want to hurt you!” Obito yelled, rolling away from the follow-up punch and throwing a warning kueni at the girl. “Just back off!” She couldn’t make herself fight a pregnant civilian.

“You back off!” Gyosan grabbed the kunai out of the air and held it like a dagger, cutting her fingers on the bottom of the ring handle. “We just want to leave!” She charged forward with the kueni, forcing Obito to grab her wrist.

The loose linen sleeve tore in Obito’s grip as she and the girl grappled, each trying to force the other to release their grip. Obito was forced to let go and back off when the rest of the Uzushio youth charged forward, taking with her a strip of Gyosan’s shirt sleeve.
Obito scrambled back and rolled to her feet, already tired and aching with sore muscles. She looked from the linen in her hand to the girl’s bared wrist, which was covered in black material, identical to the under layers ANBU wore. Obito’s jaw dropped and a rush of anger raced through her, preventing her from holding back her strength as she dealt with four tentative Uzushio attackers, prying a staff from one of them to beat back them all.

“That’s mine! You’re wearing my Fuuinjutsu!” She grabbed a clumsily aimed foot and ripped at the linen trouser leg. Underneath was more black fabric, Obito’s neat seals against chakra and dirt glimmering slightly in the daylight. “You stole my Fuuinjutsu! From the ANBU?” Obito held the staff like a club glaring at the hesitant Uzushio youth, some of them now bruised and bleeding from her hits.

“You stole them first!” yelled the boy with purple hair. “Fuuinjutsu are an Uzushiogakure invention and you’re an Uchiha. You stole them!”

“You can’t copy Fuuinjutsu, you idiot!” Obito snarled. “It’s like reading out aloud a letter without knowing the language, there’s no real power behind it if you don’t understand what your doing.” Obito pointed the staff at him. “You look a lot like Yuugao - did she give them to you?”

“That suckup? Please.” The purpled haired boy rolled his eyes. “She’d have turned us all rather than risk her rank. She’s betraying her people, becoming another faceless killer.

“And what do you think is going to happen to your families when word spreads about you leaving Konoha was stolen ANBU uniforms and a Iwa-nin.” Obito demanded.

“Isubi isn’t from Iwa, he’s from Ame.” another red-head corrected, tilting his head in confusion.

“Then why was he part of the Iwa group that killed my aunt and kidnapped me when they couldn’t get at a bunch of scared kids?” Obito demanded.

“Because he’s using them!” Yashino yelled as he appeared in their midst and threw Shiokaze at his followers, panting from his fight. “Konoha took your people in while in the middle of a siege! We gave you shelter and food when we were damn near starving ourselves. And all you lot have done since then is bitch about how we won’t let you get yourselves killed returning to the coast. Do you not understand what Iwa will do to any one of Uzu blood? What any village save Konoha will do to get your sealing secrets, your blood limits?”

“Better to die in noble struggle than remain in the village that shuns our traditions and treats our children like second class civilians!” Shiokaze argued, climbing to his feet and spitting out a loose tooth. “We were promised equality and safety, not to picked away by nameless shadows, see our noble names looked down at!”

“Yeah, that’s why all the followers you can get are some bunch of ignorant youngsters who don’t know how terrible the outside world can be.” Yashino scoffed. He ran his eyes over the now subdued Uzushio youths. “I don’t know what kind of sea sewage this man has promised you but that shinobi over there is the first Ame ninja in over twenty years I’ve fought. And no one that ventures into Ame ever leaves, the Salamander Hanzo kills anyone that lays eyes on his village.”

“Shows what you know!” the purpled haired boy yelled. “We know who’s really in charge! A proper-” the other Uzushio boy smacked him in the mouth.

“No one gets into Ame without Hanzo knowing. He sees all and he kills all enemies, imagined or not. If Hanzo were dead Ame would have asked for aid, for food. You’re walking into a trap.” Yashino stared down the glaring Shiokaze. “You’re going to get yourselves killed.”
“And you’d know all about traps, wouldn’t you Uchiha.” Shiokaze hissed. “It’s your family that’s blamed for the Kyuubi attack, for the high amount of deaths. That’s why you’re compound is under watch, day and night.”

“What are you talking about?” Obito asked, having made her way to Yashino’s side. “No one is spying on us. That’s ridiculous,” she looked over to Yashino, more to check him over for injuries than to gauge his reaction to her words.

Yashino shifted and avoided looking at her. “Our clan lost more than any other in the Kyuubi attack!” he argued instead. “We followed the Hokage’s orders and paid a heavy price guarding the civilians.”

“Guarding the civilians of the shinobi clans! Where was our protection? I saw the shinobi fighting the beast! I saw how its attacks were deliberately knocked into our district! There were no Uchiha protecting us that day!” Shiokaze declared. “That was the day I knew I had a duty to go and take as many of my people as I could!”

“Take it up with the Hokage, not us!” Yashino said, exasperated. “We only did what we were told!”

“So follow orders once more and everything will go smoothly!” came a new voice and everyone started at the sudden appearance of an unknown kunoichi, holding Mitsubachi captive in a bubble of water. The water around them was thick with dead bugs and blood but they were still alive, their uncovered eyes wide as they thrashed fluitly to free their head from the water. “Weapons down, hands flat above your heads. Or the Aburame drowns right in front of you.”

The woman had burn marks around her hard blue eyes and more burns emerging from under a black bandana on her head. Even so, her voice and her body language told Obito exactly who she was. Turtle, the sole Root Operative to survive the mission to Suna, who Obito had last seen when jumping from the back of a bat summons, having been the one to set it, and Turtle, on fire.

Obito was the first one to obey, knowing Turtle was crazy enough to carry out her threat. Yashino followed suit a second after, body shaking and all semblance of composer lost. “Please.” He whispered too softly to be heard. “Let them go.”

Turtle nodded and called over to the Uzushio leader. “Shiokaze, Isubi has gone ahead, take your followers. I’ll be right behind you.”

“Yes. Right.” Shiokaze smoothed out his cloak and gestured imperiously. “Come my children, let us make haste to our new promised land! I’ll be right behind you!”

With uncertainty on their faces and shocked looks at Turtle and Mitsubuchi, the Uzushio did as they were told, gathering together once more, rubbing at their various aches and hurts from the fighting.

“Let. Them. Go.” Yashino hissed, his eyes locked on Mitsubuchi’s face as the Aburame slowly lost consciousness. They fell to the ground, head still encased in Turtle’s water ball. “They’re drowning!”

Obito shifted, her arm already aching from being raised above her head. The Uzushio group were heading for the wall and Turtle was smirking right at her, her burned face twisted in triumph.

“I’ll release the jutsu when you knock her out and roll her over to me.” Turtle said, indicating to Obito.

To his credit, Yashino was clearly conflicted as his eyes flickered between the love of his life and the girl of his clan. His shoulders slumped, and his arms shook with indecision. He opened his mouth to respond-
“I’ll come quietly! Just let Mitsu breath!” Obito called, unable to bear either decision Yashino made. If he picked her over his lover, or an outsider over his kin… neither choice was right.

“Ha! I’m not falling for your helpless routine again. I know how crafty you can be!” Turtle snarled, drawing her sword.

How had things escalated to this point? All Obito had done was ask around about a few missing kids, try and do what her clan was supposed to, protect the citizens of the village. The escaped kidnapper and Root operative had not been expected. Was this Obito’s fault for not thinking before reacting? She hoped Tenzo wasn’t watching this.

Was Kakashi going to do when he found out?

Obito stared up at the kodachi blade, Turtle’s steady hand and twitchy eyes and saw no way out. She was going with this crazy woman and she probably wasn’t going with all her fingers attached.

Chapter End Notes

dun dun dundun!

If anyone is confused, Isubi is the formally unnamed Iwa kidnapper that Obito convinced Kakashi to keep alive waaaay back in the last chapter of Bend. And the whole thing with Ame is related to the fact that with no Obito to mess up Akatsuki’s plans, Nagato vs Hanzo had a very different ending...
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Sakuya Uchiha, Obito's long-suffering cousin is on the case that will define her career. Just not in the way she had hoped. There's a terrible reunion for terrible reasons. Everyone has to deal with the bad decisions they've made and Ranma finally pushes too hard.

Chapter Notes

Remember when this was supposed to be lighthearted filler before the dramatic conclusion? Welp now it's wall to wall worldbuilding and drama. Unbetaed. I have a terrible suspicion I've dropped the ball on a bunch plot points in this chapter, please send me a comment if something seems wrong or doesn't make sense.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sakuya Uchiha, youngest sergeant of the Western Police Station, with a shot of becoming Police Captain if she played her cards right, was not having a good day.

It had started with a simple missing children report, one Sakuya had taken early that morning in the hope of completing it fast and spending the rest of the day with her girlfriend. Bright purple hair wasn’t very common, even in a village of shinobi. One purple haired boy shouldn’t be too hard to find in the small district his people occupied. Sakuya was going to hunt the lost fourteen year old down, return him home and be able to spend some time with Sumiya in her quiet morgue away from prying eyes. They might even have had an opportunity to eat together, sitting sit by side among the bagged and weighed body parts, feeding each other bites from their cheap store bought lunches.

The missing child, Chokorēto Uzuki’s family had seemed happy, surprised even when Sakuya showed up to examine his room. His parents were eager to answer her questions, tell her how their sweet son had slowly changed when he started hanging out with a new group of friends, causing the family endless worry as he started getting into trouble. Three weeks ago there had been a huge fight between him and his formally favorite cousin, the family’s only shinobi. After that Chokorēto had disappeared for hours at a time.

“But he always came home before dark!” sobbed his one father, while the other stared at Sakuya desperately, “He’s a good boy, he wouldn’t put us through this on purpose. Something has to have happened to him and the others!”

Sakuya’s pen stopped writing and she looked up from her investigation notes. “Others?” she asked with unease.

* 

One missing child turned into seven, and seven missing children turned into seven thieving youths. Sakuya did spend lunch in Sumiya’s office, but it was while pouring over various documents trying
to make sense of why those specific children had gone missing with their families possessions. Sumiya had been the one to absentmindedly point out that all the items were old enough to have come from Uzushio originally, while examining the false ANBU symbol on a body found near Konoha’s prison.

The final break in the case had been on Sakuya’s second visit to the Uzushio district when she forced her way into the basement of one of the larger buildings in the area, which was a school for the area’s children. Schools in Konoha were wide and varied, from basic creches to the Monk-run Temple schools. There was little legislation or policies for them in Konoha’s official law books, since it was usual for most of the big clans to teach their children until they went into apprenticeships or to the Shinobi Academy. The police only got involved when rumours of chakra training or anti-Konoha ideologies were being taught.

Looking around at the basement walls covered in anatomy posters with chakra systems inked on and piles of training staffs and targets posts, Sakuya could safely consider the Eastern district’s school to be breaking the law.

“This room has such a high ceiling, for being underground.” she said calmly to the looming headteacher, knowing that he knew she had seen the law violations. “Aren’t you afraid of the damp coming up, being so close to the river?”

“We are of Uzushio. We know how to deal with rising water.” the teacher assured her. “We know how to deal with all kinds of threats.” he said pointedly, eyes closed and body language relaxed. His past break in composer, when Sakuya found the half burnt pages detailing one child’s packing list for New Uzushio, had passed quickly.

“Except threats from your own people.” Sakuya gestured to the missing teacher’s desk, strewn with the pages she had found in a hidden drawer, all about how his fellow teachers were idiots and accomplices and he, Shiokaze was the only true Son of the Sea left to lead his people to their former glory.

“Yes, well.” the head teacher slumped slightly and opened his blue eyes to look at her honestly. “I didn’t think Shiokaze was this crazy.”

“I don’t think crazy is enough to get seven troubled youths to steal from their parents and agree to leave everything to start a new life somewhere else.” Sakuya said, using her Sharingan to memorise another page of writing. There might be a code in it somewhere, revealing where exactly Shiokaze was getting his intel about Konoha’s patrol times and outer village security.

“They’re underage children, Uchiha, not accountable for their actions,” he corrected sharply. “We don’t call out children adults and send them out to kill at twelve.”

Sakuya shrugged and took one more scan of the room. “No, and you don’t teach them how to tell when someone is manipulating you for their own aims, either.” She looked again at the training posts, all missing the labels for killing stikes. “If you send a few of the more talented students over to the Academy, ones that get bored with your self-defense classes, then this won’t happen again.”

The teacher looked at Sakuya, easily hearing the bargain in her words and sighed again, “Yes. That sounds... fair.” he agreed but his mouth twisted with bitterness as he sold away a few talented children to the Shinobi Academy to protect the rest of his school.

*
Sakuya reported her ongoing investigation to a sullen Fugaku, who was still fuming about the last council meeting, and went home with Sumiya that afternoon, trusting her mother would be too caught up in Obito’s party plans to notice she hadn’t been home in twenty-four hours. Sakuya once again promised herself she’d do something nice for her cousin sometime, for dealing with Izanami’s pent up need to control her daughter’s life. Obito was just better at dealing with family drama than Sakuya and she actually was available for match-making. Maybe Sakuya could get someone in her old war squad to promise to be that Kyuubi kid’s Genin teacher in a couple of years. That might relax Obito enough to get her to fall into line and marry, sparing Sakuya the obligation of bringing the next generation of Izuna’s descendants into the world.

Of course, just after Sumiya settled into a post-coil doze and Sakuya was mentally reviewing her casenotes while stroking Sumiya’s blonde hair, the prison break alarms went off, sending subtle chakra signals through every shinobi within the village.

Sumiya didn’t even stir when Sakuya moved her out of her arms and got redressed, dashing off without leaving a note. And they had just made up after their last fight about Sakuya putting her duties ahead of her relationship. Sakuya would have to mope excessively to get back into Sumiya’s good books.

Sakuya got to the closest police gathering point in record time, but Inabi Uchiha still managed to be there first and assume command. The power-grasping Chuunin gave Sakuya a knowing smirk before wrapping up his speech to the other three Uchiha. “it’s unlikely the prisoners will make it to the Boundary Wall, even if they do have more inside help but just in case I want to assign guards to the inner sides-”

“I thought the jail was secure.” argued the much older Daiki. “There weren’t any jailbreaks when we were in charge of running it. What are those idiots doing?”

“Unless you have any actual plans to deal with prisoners using underground tunnels I suggest you shut up,” Inabi told him. “You never know who’s listening.”

As one all the Uchiha’s eyes flickered over to the nearest surveillance point that the ANBU had used the past four years to spy on their clan. Indignation had faded to resignation over the years but of late counter-surveillance had reported their watchers had had their schedules disrupted on occasion.

Sakuya wanted to ask Obito if her old teammate knew anything about it, but she didn’t want to give Obito an excuse to contact Kakashi too soon. That breakup needed to be well and truly done before they met up again. Sakuya’s continued freedom depended on Obito falling into line and marrying within the clan.

“Wait-” Sakuya said, thoughts of Obito turning to thoughts of her Fuuinjutsu and what she had been working on for the Tower. “The prison is built on sandy ground to prevent tunneling. How’d the prisoners dig a tunnel without it collapsing?”

“Outside help, something about Fuuinjutsu…” Inabi said carelessly, then looked around again and gestured for everyone to lean forward. “Speaking of which, anyone know where Obito’s got to?” he asked innocently, like he hadn’t been low key plotting to marry Sakuya’s little cousin for years.

“I thought she was with my mom or else at one of her veteran meetings.” Sakuya said softly as everyone covered their mouths to prevent lip reading.

“Yashino vouched for her this morning and she hasn’t been home since.”

“Well Yashino’s a Jounin, he can keep her safe.” Daiki leaned out of their huddle to judge the
distance down to the street level.

“He *was* a Jounin. Now he’s just old and he doesn’t have the Sharingan.”

“Yeah Inabi, that’s why he hasn’t gone blind like your dad.” said Kenta rudely, rolling his brown Sharingan-incapable eyes. “Do you have to be such an elitist prick all the time?”

“I saw her with some kid an hour ago, definitely a shinobi kid, but not one I recognised.” volunteered Daiki then he jumped down to the ground and walked off to his assigned spot, avoiding family conflict like always.

“That’s fine then,” Sakuya rolled her shoulders, “Probably a Genin helping her with her sewing stuff. Now about the village wide alert: do we know who’s even escaped?” she asked Inabi as Kenta left as well.

“One of the hush hush ones from the really high level security points. Word is it took two groups to help him escape, one group from above who entered disguised as ANBU and another group that tunneled in from nearby.” Inabi shrugged and activated his Sharingan to scan across the rooftops.

“Tunneled…” Sakuya said again, thinking of the basement classroom and the headteacher who said they knew how to deal with rising damp. Shiokaze’s rambling notes had said something about saving the guide to the new land from the dark hounds - it wasn’t a stretch to think he meant the Inuzuka prison guards…

“-and Sakuya, you can take the west wall watchtower-”

“North.” Sakuya corrected Inabi, remembering the rough sketches one of the kids had left in their room of various village points. “I’ll check the northridge, right out of the village proper.”

Inabi frowned at her. “That’s the furthest point of the wall from the prison and one of the highest and bare. No one bothers to guard it half the time. Especially since the Hyuuga are still homebound.”

“Exactly.” Sakuya said grimly, and leaped up and onto the next rooftop over. “If I’m not back at the station in ten minutes, send back up!” she yelled back at Inabi then cast a concealing genjutsu over herself to speed to the wall without interruptions. She almost hoped she was wrong, that the Uzushio crowd had nothing to do with the prison break. Because if they did, then no matter their young age or how tricked they had been, they were all complacent to crimes that could lead to execution.

When the buildings ended Sakuya opted for the ground path instead of tree jumping and raced over grass and fields, grateful she had kept up her fitness from the war years. Her supply team had had the fastest response time of all Konoha teams, save the Yellow Flash himself.

Sakuya checked her sword was safely sheathed, wishing the thousandth time Minato Namikaze was still with them. Not even counting the advantages of having a student of the Hokage as a clan member or the fact that their Lady Uchiha had served with his wife; Namikaze had been young and vibrant and audacious. Not old and tired and defeated, like their current Hokage. If the Fourth was still alive Sakuya would never even consider the words some of the more angry Uchiha had started to whisper to each other. About how something had to change and soon.

Multiple flares of chakra ahead of her told Sakuya her hunch had been right and she banished her thoughts, focusing only on the situation ahead of her.

* The reunion had gone about as well as Jiraiya had expected. Tsunade had reacted to the sudden
appearance of him and a team of Elite Konoha ANBU by throwing him through a wall and bolting from the inn they had found her smoking next to. Fortunately Dog Brat’s summons caught her scent and the tallest ANBU member knew enough healing jutsu to get Jiraiya up and on his feet again to follow the dogs for the rest of the day.

After Tsunade’s display of violence they decided to hang back and let her tire before approaching her again.

Sure enough, late that evening they found her seated in the only bar of a small village, morosely drinking sake by the bottle. Jiraiya left an empty seat between them as he sat down and waited, looking at her from the corner of his eye. Tsunade was unchanged, as if thirty years of life had not passed since their brutal battle with Hanzo. Time had not touched Tsunade skin or body, freezing her in the perfect vision Jiraiya still dreamed of some nights. It should have made him giddy, a twenty-year-old’s body with a mature woman’s experience and knowledge. But all Jiraiya could feel was tired as he silently accepted the cup a nervous server gave him.

“I suppose you’re here to take me back.” Tsunade finally spoke, defiance in her tone.

“No.” Jiraiya said simply and drank.

Behind them half the team had entered the room, one of the kunoichi speaking urgently to Tsunade’s apprentice who looked about to break something herself. Little Shizune was not so little anymore and Jiraiya was about to call out a friendly observation of that to her, when the memory of Obito’s words to him washed over him. “...forget basic decency, nothing matters but what you want.”

He shook his head to dislodge the memory and Tsunade finally put down her drink to look directly at him. “Why are you and an ANBU team here, if not to drag me back to that village.” Her eyes showed her age, shadowed and weighed down with regret and anger.

“To give you this,” Jiraiya pulled out an official mission scroll and placed it down on the table between them. “Complete a single mission and you will be granted travel papers for the next five years.”

Tsunade gave a bark of laughter at him and waved for more drink. “I haven’t needed travel papers for more than a decade, what makes you think I need them now?”

“Is that a refusal?”

“It is.”

“Right then.” Jiraiya swallowed the last of his cup, “Then hand me your headband and necklace and I’ll be on my way.”

“Excuse me?” Tsunade crushed a bottle in her hand, more in surprise than in threat.

“Things have changed in twenty years, even if your tits haven’t,” Jiraiya dodged the flung glass the crude remark automatically drew. “Betrayal has hardened Sensei’s heart.”

“Betrayal? What betrayal has he had, that can compare to how he betrayed me?” Tsunade hissed, too angry to react again. “Everyone I ever loved, died for the sake of that village, under his leadership. I owe him nothing.”

“Complete this mission and that will be true.”

“What mission could I possibly complete in my condition? I can’t bear the sight of blood, I’m useless
in battle and most healing situations.” Tsunade looked away for a moment, the admission hurting her pride. Behind them the sound of Shizune laughing with her reunited agemates made Jiraiya feel older than ever. Most of the shinobi behind him were the offspring of his generation, the age his children could have been if he had stayed in Konoha instead of becoming a wandering Toad Sage and spymaster. The age Tsunade and Dan’s children could have been if he had lived, if a million things hadn’t gone wrong and led to this; two old Sannin sitting at a bar awkwardly, while their third was the biggest traitor their village had ever produced since Madara Uchiha.

“Which is why we need your particular poison-making skills.” Jiraiya said calmly, hiding the distaste he had for the mission. It was necessary he agreed, but very cold-blooded. The type of vicious plotting that he would have objected to when he was young and idealistic.

Tsunade slumped down, elbows on the dirty bar counter, “Who on earth needs to be poisoned so badly the old man sent you to find me?”

“Hi,” Hizashi Hyuuga plonked himself down on the empty stool between the old teammates and took up the abandoned bottle of sake. “I need your help to kill the Raikage in a way that can’t get traced back to my clan.”

*

The sword in Obito’s face was abruptly gone as a black and blue blur plowed into Turtle, sending her flying backwards. The blur paused to reveal herself as her cousin Sakuya, giving Obito a look full of questions and anger, before going back to watching Turtle warely. “She the escaped prisoner?” Sakuya asked, standing defensibly in front of Obito.

“No, Turtle here is a false ANBU who helped the prisoner escape!” Obito spluttered out, still shaking from her brush with death. “She’s all brainwashed and thinks she’s serving Konoha by letting a bunch of kids go to Rain with an escaped prisoner!” Obito didn’t stop to wonder how her cousin knew about the escaped prisoner, used to Sakuya being an all knowing source of information.

The waterball around Mitsubachi’s head had popped when Turtle had been knocked down and Yashino was sobbing as he knelt over them, frantically pounding on his lover’s chest.

Turtle appeared to have forgotten everything but her opponent, glaring at Sakuya, who drew her own sword, standing tall and proud in her police uniform. “Right then,” Sakuya stated addressing Turtle, “You’re under arrest for treason, aiding an enemy nin in escaping prison, killing three guards, attempting to kill four more and subverting the youth of Konoha.”

Turtle spat at Sakuya’s sandaled feet. “Everything I do, I do for the good of Konoha. Nothing a member of the Uchiha clan could ever understand.” And then the two woman engaged in the kind of sword fight that made samurai weep - fast, filthy and with ninjutsu.

As soon as Mitsubachi revived enough to start coughing up water and Yashino started sobbing in earnest on their shoulder, Obito picked up the forgotten staff with a shaky hand and ran, following after the Uzushio group. They had been heading right for the base of Konoha’s boundary wall, she had no idea how they were planning to get over it, the seals upon the rock structure had been made by Mito Senju herself, preventing chakra use on either side and making the stone too hard for any grips to be hammered into the stone.

Obito came into view of the base of the wall just as the last of the Uzushio group left the ground, climbing up the wall with bare feet and hands. Obito’s jaw dropped as she used her Sharingan to get a closer look to confirm that yes, all the Uzushio were climbing the completely vertical wall with no chakra at all, just white powder on their hands and feet, with ropes around their waists linking each
climber together in a row. Her former kidnapper - apparently from Ame - was right in the middle of
the group, being supported by two Uzushio climbers on either side as he slowly climbed his way up
inexperienced.

“You kids are making a huge mistake!” Obito yelled up at them. “You go over that wall and you’re
officially runaways! Konoha and your parents can’t protect you out there!”

“Yeah? Like Konoha protected you?” Yelled back the pregnant Gyosan, the furthest up on the wall.
“We’ll take our chances, thanks!”

Obito screamed with frustration and almost punched the wall, just remembering in time at anything
with chakra touching the wall got knocked out. Even plants and animals that come into contact with
all but the very top of the wall were shocked and often killed. So how were the Uzushio going up?
Even if they weren’t using chakra to stick to the wall, they all had chakra flowing through their
bodies naturally that should be making the wall wards hurt them.

Obito stared up at the climbers, her eyes drawn to the black under layers they all wore, her own
damn work about to leave the village in the possession of ungrateful brats and traitors. Obito’s mind
went back to her time in prison, trapped in stone caves far underground, with no light save candles
and glowing rock. What was the point in anything she done since escaping Iwa, if she couldn’t stop
a few children from climbing a wall?

Obito had worked so hard for years on her Fuuinjutsu skills and now they were being used by
traitors… Why would they steal such things, if they hadn’t planned to fight their way out? What was
the point of defection and privacy seals she has sewn being used by escaping children?

The tiny stitches on the leg of the lowest climber flickered softly as the privacy seals were activated,
restraining the wearer’s scent, sound and chakra-

Chakra! Obito’s seals on the ANBU underlayers kept the wall’s seals from detecting the chakra of
those climbing the walls! She screeched to herself looking around frantically for something, anything
to stop them. They were using her own seals to climb the wall without being hurt. Her own creation,
her hard mastered skill and effort being worn by an enemy. Obito had pricked her fingers on needles
and wrapped the thread in her chakra, watched and felt every single one of the stitches as they went
into the fabric, more of her chakra applied liberally over the completed seal at the end to activate it.
Obito’s sweat and blood and chakra was in that stitchwork.

Wait.

Obito’s tilted her head up again and focused her Sharingan even further, concentrating on the minute
stitches, covered in her chakra-

Her chakra.

In her Fuuinjutsu.

On the material worn by every single one of the Uzushio climbers.

Obito could sense her chakra on each of them, when she concentrated hard enough.

They were wearing her chakra, active and formed into chakra thread, just waiting to be used.

Obito looked down at the embroidered scarf she wore around her shoulders and concentrated on the
small storage seal stitched onto Minato’s old flak jacket fabric. The threads obediently unraveled
themselves, dissolving the seal as the thread fell to the ground as chakra infused silk, looking like one
of her pure chakra strings.

With her heart pounding, Obito looked up again the climbers, some of them almost at the top of the wall and focused with all her will on the small pockets of her chakra on each of their arms and legs.

*  

Sakuya didn’t react when multiple voices suddenly started screaming far behind her. She was used to Obito causing such reactions in new people. Her opponent was giving her a real challenge and clearly wasn’t concerned with defeating Sakuya alive. Sakuya needed to keep all her attention on the disgraced ANBU, not whatever Obito was doing to the Uzushio brats.

“Give up, reinforcements will be here in minutes and you’ll be sentenced before the sun sets.” Sakuya reasoned again, dodging a water jutsu and kunai hidden within it. “Show some remorse, lay down your weapon and Lord Hokage might show mercy.”

“Mercy?” Hissed the traitor, her eyes wild. “Mercy is a weakness.” She dodged away from Sakuya’s strike, again avoiding getting her eyes caught in Sakuya’s Sharingan, as good as any of Sakuya’s family. This woman had training in fighting Uchiha, which was just as concerning as anything else Sakuya had discovered in her days of investigating the missing Uzushio children. Maybe that was where the woman got her facial burns from, fighting one of Sakuya’s fellow Jounin relatives.

The woman Obito had named Turtle lunged forward in a suicidal strike and Sakuya had to twist and turn, bring her sword up to prevent her from killing them both. Sakuya needed this kunoichi brought in alive, there were too many mysteries attached to her that needed to be solved.

The strike had been a trick and Turtle ran as soon as Sakuya wasn’t blocking the route to the wall and Sakuya cursed and ran after her, glancing back to where Yashino was slowly dragging his old teammate away from the chaos. The old man was really passed his best, going to pieces in a crisis.

“Stop in the name of the law!” Sakuya yelled and sheathed her sword to pull out shuriken.

Turtle didn’t even glance back at Sakuya, didn’t slow down as the wall came into view with multiple decapitated heads laying on the ground around Obito, who blanched at the sight of Turtle running run at her.

Obito raised her bare hands as Turtle charged her, sword aimed at her neck.

Sakuya used Kawarimi to swap places with Obito without hesitation, years of defending her weaker cousin overriding her Sharingan, that said Obito’s body language signaled she had been about to do something.

The shuriken Sakuya had been holding cut into her hands as she used them to block Turtle’s sword, but it was minor damage compared to what Obito would have been dealt.

“Damn it Sakuya!” yelled Obito, having fallen over from the force of Sakuya’s Kawarimi. “I had it under control.”

Sakuya didn’t dignify that lie with a response, catching Turtle’s leg with her own while both their hands were occupied and tripping her up. The decapitated heads screamed as Turtle tumbled next to them, sinking down into mud.

Ah, Obito had trapped the kids all in a mud Doton. Clever but unnecessary.

Sakuya did a head count and realised two of the children (Gyosan Tatsumaki, age sixteen and
pregnant, and Ebimaru Anryuu, age nineteen, the likely father) and the mastermind Shiokaze were missing. As was the escaped prisoner.

“Where’s the rest of them,” Sakuya demanded, using her Sharingan to seek out evidence of them buried under the mud. “Obito? Tell me you didn’t let the leader get away.”

Obito, still on her hands and knees snapped her head up to glare at Sakura’s question. “They were too high to pull down. They went over. The escaped prisoner too.”

“Went over what?” Sakuya looked around the bare area as she wiped her still bleeding hands on her police jacket, “Over that hill? The next wall gate is guarded, they’ll never get through.”

“Over the wall!” Obito pointed exasperatedly up at the very top of the stone structure, one Sakuya knew for a fact to be unclimbable.

And yet, when Sakuya’s Sharingan focused on the top of the wall, she could see bloody handprints, as if someone had clawed up over the lip of the top, and onto the unguarded walkway along the top of the wall.

“Right.” Sakuya muttered and looked around, taking stock of the situation. There were seven kids buried to their shoulders in mud plus a cursing mystery kunoichi inching her way to freedom. (Sakuya knelt and put her chakra damper handcuffs on her nearest arm and leg. Turtle gave a scream of rage and sank down into the mud again.) Obito was sitting on her butt, staring at the trapped bodies with amazement, for some reason impressed with her own ability to perform a simple B-rank jutsu.

“I’m going for the nearest gate, might catch them on the way down.” Sakuya announced. “You are in so much trouble when I get back,” she told them all. “Everyone just- stay here until help arrives!”

Sakuya ran, various yells of indignation and fear following her. Only Obito could make a complicated matter of missing children, spy-nin and civilians even more complicated.

* 

“I hate your whole family.” Turtle told Obito when she managed to get her head out of the mud again.

“You and me both.” Obito said absentmindedly, concentrating on manipulating her chakra thread on each kid and making sure no one further sank into the mud or drifted too close to Turtle. “No suicide attempts now, I’m sure the Hokage will have a lot of questions for you.”

“You honestly think the Hokage doesn’t know everything that happens in his village? This is his will I am obeying, using immigrant scum to infiltrate an enemy village-”

“Fuck you lady.” the purple haired boy gargled out from his corner of the mud pit.

“-and finally discovered what the old Salamander is hiding in behind his walls.”

“So you got this mission directly from the Hokage? You stood in front of him and he verbally told you to kill loyal Konoha ninja to free an enemy agent and help him and a bunch of stupid kids climb our main defence and join an enemy village? Really?” Obito asked mildly as she got out all the spools of thread she had on her and started to unravel them.

“-fuck you too Uchiha-”
“Shut up Chokorēto,” muttered one of the other children, “Just shut up. We’re in so much trouble, don’t make it worse.”

“You better hope you’re locked up by the time your cousin Yuugao gets back,” Obito told Chokorēto as she tied together the starts of her thread. “Because you must be the one that stole ANBU property last seen in her hands, which meant if you got away she would have been accused of the theft herself.” Obito got up slowly and waved around her thread like a rope.

“What are you doing?” One of the Uzushio prisoners asked.

“Trying something.” said Obito softly and threw the thread up, trying to get it high in the air. Maybe if she got it high enough she could... set off the wards? On the other side and stop the other four? Obito didn’t know but she had to try something.

“Finally!” Turtle said as someone approached, “Help me out of here, this Uchiha has taken these children hostage and I-” she cut off when she saw who it was.

“Umm….” Tenzo hesitantly put his gloved hands together, his posture at odds with his full ANBU uniform. “I did go home, like I was ordered. But I was also ordered by the captain to keep an eye on you so… I came back?” He seemed very uncertain of himself.

“Oh my gods, Shiokaze was right,” the older of the Uzushio girls said, “Konoha does kidnap toddlers and put them into ANBU. I thought he was exaggerating their ages.”

Obito ignored the stares and whispers and rushed up to Tenzo with relief. “This is perfect.” she dropped her voice, “Tenzo, can you grow a tree as high as the Village wall?”

“I don’t think I should-” Tenzo’s dog mask did nothing to hide his torn emotions as he looked around, taking in the very high wall, the gasping children and death glaring Turtle. “I’m sure that’s against a lot of laws… and I’m not supposed to use my Mokuton in front of civilians.”

“This is an emergency! A spy and a traitor are escaping the village with important seals!” Obito grabbed Tenzo’s hands and stared imploringly at him. “Please Ten-Dog! Please help me stop them! I can catch them without going over the wall myself if we work fast.”

“Kinoe! Remember where your loyalty lies!” Called Turtle, not knowing when to quit, “You can not trust the Uchiha! They live and breath hate and anger. Remember what you were trained to do! What you owe to our leader.”

“If this is what we sounded like when following Shiokaze, then I’m starting to see why we had so much trouble getting more followers…” a different Uzushio boy muttered.

Turtle’s words seemed to have an affect on Tenzo and he drew himself up, into a more threatening stance. Obito backed off a bit, worried he was reverting to Danzo’s training.

“My name is not Kinoe,” Tenzo said quietly, but firmly. “My sister gave me back my name, my real name. And I know what I owe and to who.” Tenzo clasped his hands together and his chakra surged around him, making his brown hair ripple in the unseen breeze. “Where do you need the tree, Lady Obito?”

* 

Obito had a head for heights. Maybe it was from living on the seventh floor of an apartment building for her first years of life, before the Uchiha clan had taken her and her grandmother in. Her crib had been put out on the tiny balcony most days, the closest thing to her own room her parents could
afford. Being disoriented or scared of being high up had never occured to Obito. She had always had other things to worry about.

Such as, she considered as Tenzo’s tree grew taller and taller, taking them both up to the very top of Konoha’s defense wall, whether being three steps away from the edge of Konoha’s official boundary marker was enough for the Hokage to consider her leaving Konoha. But it was too late to worry about that small detail. At least they had got just out of sight of the mud stuck group, a slim attempt to keep the Mokuton a secret.

Obito swung her rope of thread around and threw it out aiming for the ordinary rope the escapees had tied to the top of the wall. If she got this right fast enough she might be able to drag the four back up and over the wall into Konoha again.

Her rope landed over the wall, right where she had aimed it. Obito took a breath, willing herself to calm down and focused on her newly realized ability, focusing on the chakra in the end her thread and manipulating it to move and tie itself to the taut rope the escapees were using to climb down the other side.

It was very similar to how Obito had always used chakra strings, except she had always needed to run a steady stream of new chakra from her fingers into the strings to keep them working, which made it hard to concentrate on manipulating them as well. But now she was using actual physical thread, saturated in her own chakra and blood. It was as easy as visualising herself darning up a tear, to will the braided thread to wrap around the normal rope and merge with it, each individual silk thread wrapping around a corresponding woollen thread right before the single knot that bound the rope to the buttress of the wall.

Soon it was as if there was a single rope on the wall, leading from Obito’s hands to over the edge of the wall. Only a single loop over the buttress with a knot kept the full weight of four climbers from resting in Obito’s hands.

“Alright,” she said, when her threads were utterly merged with the other rope. “Tie this end to the strongest branch and get ready.”

“Are you sure this will work?” Tenzo asked, even as he bound her rope to the base of the branch they were standing on. “What if the rope snaps, or what if they’re already down the other side?”

“Then at least we can say we tried.” Obito insisted getting out a kunai. “Alright, make sure we don’t brush against the wall or we really will be in trouble.” With those cheerful words she threw the kunai and cut the loop tying the rope to the parapet. With the loss of that, Obito’s rope went taunt under the full weight, stretching from the thick branch it was tied to to down over the edge of the wall. It held, Obito feeling it out with her chakra and strengthening bits of it where she thought it felt weakening. “Okay, now it’s your turn.”

Tenzo nodded and again clasped his hands together in the final hand sign of the Mokuton. When this was all over Obito would have time to consider the fact that the ultimate bloodlimit, the one her clan blamed for tipping the balance of power into the Senju’s favour, made it’s user look like they were praying or beseeching a higher power for help. Tenzo’s prayers appeared answered as his tree slowly began to move, the branch the rope was tied to bending down and pulling the rope down with it.

Which meant the other side of the rope, the side Shiokaze would-be Uzushiogakure, Isubi would-be Uchiha kidnapper and Rain-nin, and two civilian kids of Uzushio blood were using, should be coming back up. They should have no choice but to either jump down to the far below ground or hold onto the rope and be brought back up to face Obito, Tenzo and whatever Konoha reinforcements that should have arrived by now.
Shiokaze appeared first, shrieking insults and calling on all manner of sea gods to defend him as the rope he was clinging to was dragged up. He landed awkwardly on the the wall walkway, gloved hands letting go of his lifeline on the rope. He had just enough composure to grab the kunai Obito had thrown before and looked about to threaten her with it, before pausing. Shiokaze looked at Obito and Tenzo, gave them an evil grin and started cutting at the main rope that had dragged him up.

“No. Stop!” Yelled Obito yelled, both to Shiokaze who was about to kill the others still over the edge and to Tenzo, who paused the tree’s shrinking with a pant of exhaustion.

“Better death than Konoha tyranny!” Shiokaze said as he sawed through the rope.

“I can’t keep us up for much longer,” Tenzo gasped. “Trees don’t like shrinking, it wants to spring up again.” Sweat dripped down from behind his mask from the strain of manipulating only part of the tree and holding the rest of the narrow trunk.

“Just hold it a minute longer.” Obito ordered as she readied herself to jump, gathering her patchwork shawl into her hands. “I can stop him.” She jumped, not looking down at the neck breaking height beneath her and landed neatly on the very top of the wall, eyes narrowed on the rope in Shiokaze’s hands. It was already fraying, despite his inexperienced skill with a kunai, using the blunter sides to saw, not the sharp tip.

“You’re too late, Red Eyes,” Shiokaze laughed. “You will not get your hands on my follower-” Obito punched him in the throat without breaking her lunge, grabbing the cut rope just in time, both her scarf-wrapped hands taking all the weight with her already aching shoulders and knees. The weight pulled her forward, forcing Obito to lean back almost vertically to gain counter-force. She couldn’t do anything but force her hands not to get go of the rope, the weight and pain occupying all of her mind and body.

“I’m coming to hel- oh no…” Tenzo’s voice carried over. “It’s not- I have to go, I’m so sorry!” And with that statement came the sound of cracking wood and Obito knew she was on her own.

She couldn’t hold her ground for long. Her footing slipped and Obito was dragged forward, her stomach bashing against the short battlement of the wall and her arms were almost yanked out of their sockets over the railing to the ground below. Obito’s eyes ended up just over the edge of the battlement, able to see straight down the wall to the ground beneath.

Gyosan had just reached the end of the rope and was able to jump down safely. Her grin of triumph, of relief as the pregnant redhead landed on the earth outside of Konoha, made something in Obito’s heart curdle unpleasantly.

Obito let the blood soaked rope slip out of her shredded palms and watched, expressionless as the Uzushio boy fell the last few meters of his descent and landed awkwardly on his butt with a yell. The Ame nin, falling from a higher level, but a trained shinobi, landed neatly with a cushioning front roll.

Isubi, or whatever his real name was, looked up and spotted Obito, glaring up at her as hard as Obito was scowling down at her former kidnapper. Without really thinking Obito reached for a weapon, already plotting the trajectory of her kunai. She’d get all three of them in the legs, preventing them from running off before Sakuya got to them-

Gyosan’s red hair caught the late evening sunlight as she stepped forward, helping the boy up, not taking any note of Isubi or Obito. He didn’t look up either, more concerned with running his hands over Gyosan’s face and shoulders, a look of adoration on his face.

Obito stared down at the loving couple, their unborn child resting safely in the center of their
embrace. She let the kunai slip from her bleeding fingers and did nothing as they turned and ran after
the beckoning Ame nin, from the Konoha wall, towards unknown dangers and untold freedom. The
three disappeared into the nearby forest without a backwards glance to the foreboding wall they had
just conquered.

Obito stayed up on the wall looking out at the unending horizon of trees and wilderness in silence, at
the highest point she would probably ever reach. She would never again be able to climb this high on
her own and no one would ever see the point in helping her up to such a dangerous spot without a
really good reason. So Obito tried to enjoy the view and ignore the sick throbbing of envy, until she
heard the footsteps and yells finally start to move towards her part of the wall and she needed to
leave.

It was the work of seconds to unravel her sewing work from the black under layers Shiokaze was
wearing and form them into chakra strings. It took a second more to tie them securely to a buttress,
before leaping off the Wall back into the inner side of Konoha. She’d worry about her landing when
she was closer to the bottom.

*

The Wall guards found Obito easily, stuck in the mud she had landed in and half drowned. There
had been a bit of confusion over which woman they should believe with Obito and Turtle yelling
contrasting versions of events and accusing the other of being a danger to Konoha.

“You met me at the Fuuinjutsu office just over a month ago!” Obito argued to the Intermediate
Fuuinjutsu user, who had moved up in rank at the same time that Obito got her Fuuinjutsu license.
He probably didn’t deserve to have so much stress in his first shift on wall duty but Obito didn’t
deserve half of what had happened to her that day either.

“I can’t swear to it sir,” the Fuuinjutsu user said nervously to the senior member of his patrol team.
“It was only for a few minutes, we barely looked at eachother-”

“You favour the Far North style of sealing, were sponsored by the Earth temple monks and hope to
join their order once your required years of service to Konoha are done.” Obito listed out, elbowing
the guard holding her shoulders. “I almost dropped your notebook when I was turning it around
trying to understand your notes.” She touched the seals on her mud soaked shirt and the mud fell
from her in thick clumps.

“I do remember that.” The man admitted with a wane smile “And I remember your sewn seals on all
your clothing. Still can’t figure out how it works.” he took in his leaders stern glare and let his smile
fall. “I’m fairly sure she’s Lord Jiraiya’s apprentice. Her work has traces of his work. And I do
remember the false leg, now that the mud is off it.”

“So we have one unknown kunoichi and one known Fuuinjutsu student a breath away from the
Wall.” The head guard rolled his eyes upwards. “Wonderful. Get them both back to HQ for
questioning.”

“I am ANBU and my authority is above yours.” Spat out Turtle, who was still covered in mud. “You
will release the Uchiha into my custody and go after the escaped traitors and drag them back to face
justice.

“The seven children you claim were rescued by a gang of civilians with handkerchiefs tied over their
faces, who were the real masterminds of the jail break and wall breach?” The head guard asked
sarcastically. “The seven children that managed to somehow defeat your ANBU eliteness and trap
you in mud with an innocent Fuuinjutsu student?”
“She’s not an innocent! She’s the reason the mission failed!” Turtle half-shirked. “The Uchiha was the one on the wall that let the other four escape!”

Everyone, Obito included, looked up at the looming wall of smooth rock then down at Obito’s false leg and the way she was clinging to the female guard in order to remain standing.

“It’s true!” Turtle full out yelled when it was clear no one believed her. “She used the Mokuton-”

The guard holding up Obito snorted. “Right, an Uchiha with the Mokuton. Okay.”

“Not her, Kinoe had it! He grew a tree to get her up there then came down to stop the civilians getting the children out of the mud. They knocked him out and a swarm of bugs-.” Turtle cut off her rant and slumped to her knees, realising how crazy her story was. “Just take us to the Tower,” she said defeatedly. “The situation will be dealt with soon enough.”

Despite herself Obito felt a little sorry for the Root operative, when she realised Turtle had no hope of surviving Danzo’s disappointment when he discovered how badly this entire scheme had gone. His one chance to get an informant inside of Rain and it had failed miserably. There was no way anyone was ever going to try escaping to that isolist village again or that Hanzo would believe a second group of Konoha natives honestly wanted to join his forces.

“I don’t know if the Tower’s a good idea.” Said Obito softly to the guard in charge. “It could still be crazy there with the prison break. Maybe we should wait somewhere else before bothering the Hokage…” And so she could have some time to work out what she was going to say to explain everything. Like how she lost track the only Mokuton user alive, got a hair’s breadth from leaving the village, saw her own Fuuinjutsu used to climb a supposedly unclimbable wall and watched three people flee the village without doing anything to stop them. Obito would need some time to work out how to tell that story from a blameless angle, never mind try and save Turtle from her fate.

“That’s a very good idea Obito,” came a new voice and Inabi strolled into view, two more Uchiha in police uniforms behind him. “We can take you both somewhere safe.” He smiled at her pleasantly then turned to address the leader guard. “We can take it from here Jouchi,” Inabi said confidently, giving the now named guard a firm nod.

Jouchi frowned and shifted awkwardly. “I don’t think I can let you do that Inabi. This is Wall jurisdiction…” he waved up at the wall next to them for emphasis.

“Really?” The barest hint of surprise came through Inabi’s voice, not turning from his gentle examination of Obito’s bleeding palms. “Because I’m currently standing on Konoha soil, which makes it police jurisdiction. We need to get these washed and banaged,” he said to Obito in a softer tone. “We can’t have your risking infection or carrying germs to Kamo.”

Obito nodded seriously, not minding how he kept a gentle hold of her hands. Inabi was good at organising thing to his benefit.

“I know it’s usually your turf, but someone was found on the wall itself.” Jouchi’s voice became firm. “And others were seen running from Konoha on the other side of us. We have to take the lead on this, I’m sorry.” And he did sound apologetic as he moved up to Inabi.

Only Obito saw Inabi’s frown of irritation before pasting on a smile and turning to look Jouchi directly. “I understand that, but Obito here is underage and injured. We’re her family, we need to take her home.”

“Or-” Obito interrupted, seeing a chance. “The Wall guards can keep custody of me and take me
back with them to see their on-duty medic and you three,” she nodded over at Kenta and Senseo who hung back. “Take this alleged ANBU back to the station and question her while the Tower is occupied elsewhere.”

“Absolutely not.” Inabi declared. “Everyone is already worried about you, I need to get you home at once.”

“She’s part of a serious breach in security,” Jouchi interjected. “I can’t tell my superiors I put an Uchiha into her family’s custody for questioning. They’d suspend my pay!”

“It will be fine Inabi,” Obito said and tried to catch his eye. “I’ll get medical care faster and you want to hear what Turtle has to say.” She waggled one eyebrow and made the police hand sign for informant, hoping he could understand her injured finger jerking. If he could get Turtle to talk then maybe something could actually be done about Danzo and his Root forces.

“Alright.” Inabi smiled professionally at Jouchi, “As long as we’re all in agreement, I’ll trust you Jouchi Chinoike, to take care of my family member.”

“Oh,” Jouchi slumped his shoulders, obviously hoping to minimise his responsibility in Obito’s care. “Sure Inabi. As you say.”

*

Ranma Uchiha had the kind of icy calm only a person about to lose their temper spectacularly could manage. The old woman had managed to banish the guards with only her stare and left Sakuya longing for more witnesses to protect her and Obito from the wrath of the elder Uchiha.

“...and your story is,” Ranma said slowly, “That you were investigating a missing child report - which I must point out again, no one can find any proof of being reported and that the parents are denying having ever made such a report - when you discovered it was actually multiple children from the Uzushio district that were missing, probably under the sway of this ‘Shiokaze’ who is under I&T custody right now.”

“Yes, Elder. As you say,” Sakuya agreed softly, bowing her head. Next to her Obito stared blankly down at her bandaged hands, disturbingly silent since returned with her family. She hadn’t even reacted when Ranma had arrived in the waiting room in all her fury. Obito had always at least attempted to justify her actions to the elders before now, to explain herself out of trouble. But for once it was Sakuya doing the talking. “And then the village alarm went off and I met up with Inabi’s group at the emergency meeting point, where I heard about the prison break. And it all fell into place for me, that it could be the children that knew how to get around the prison wards by digging tunnels.” She swallowed, unsure of how much about her visit to the Uzushio quarters she should mention. “...so I went to check the least patrolled part of the Great Wall. And I found Obito, Yashino, his old teammate, that Aburame, being held at blade point by some insane kuno-”

“The kunoichi that we’ve got in custody at the station, who the Tower can’t decide if they want her back or if they want to pretend she doesn’t exist.” Ranma interrupted again.

“I’d swear she’s ANBU Elder, I’d swear on my bloodline.” Sakuya said urgently, “She could keep up with me while avoiding my eyes, she’s had training in fighting against the Sharingan. Where else could she get such training than from your brother’s old teammates?” She glanced again at her cousin, waiting for Obito to react to the revelation that the Hokage and his council knew how to fight against their great trump card. “Obito called her Turtle, they seemed to know each other.”

Obito stared down at her lap, frowning to herself.
Ranma and Sakuya exchanged glances. Obito had never been this quiet so long before. She had been in custody for two hours and that had only been the barrier squad’s offices, nowhere near Interrogation, ANBU or any other threatening group. She couldn’t have been hurt or threatened too much, they had bandaged her wounds and gotten her a set of crutches to use. More worryingly was Obito actually using them, when she usually needed to nagged or ordered to keep weight off her legs.

“And you claim that these alleged Uzushio traitors were there too,” Ranma finally prompted, losing interest in watching Obito frown to herself. “And the ringleader, and the prisoner that they had freed, all trying to escape.”

“Yes, while I fought the kunoichi, everyone else got out of the way. Yashino dragged his teammate away,” Sakuya wondered if she was playing up her ignorance of Yashino’s real connection to Mitsubachi too much. Outside clan love affairs was one topic she wanted to keep out the current crisis. “Obito followed after the kids and their leader toward the base of the wall. I fought the kunoichi for what must have been about sixteen minutes, before she broke away and I chased after her. I stopped her from killing Obito again.” she stopped, waiting for Obito to justify herself, try and explain her failures like she always did. Nothing from her little cousin. “And saw seven of the Uzushio group were trapped in what looked like mud. I thought Obito had lured them there or made the trap with mud jutsu. I pushed my opponent in, cuffed her and left Obito to guard them when I saw signs of someone having got up and over the wall. The Gate Guard records my actions from there.”

“So it was Obito who let the traitors escape.” Ranma said intently. “You left her with them, all trapped in the mud, but when Inabi and his squad arrived all they found was the kunoichi and Obito, knocked out and half drowned in the mud. And the Uzushio teacher on top of a warded, unclimbable wall, also knocked out.”

“That teacher is a fanatic traitor who aimed to escape to Ame with a prisoner he broke out of prison and a bunch of Uzushio urchins. I don’t know how he got up there or who knocked him out!” Sakuya exclaimed, losing her grip on her nerves. “The Inuzuka picked up the scent of three people at the outside base of the wall, they have to be the prisoner and two of the traitors.”

“You had best pray to our ancestors they find something, because if they don’t capture someone it looks like you escalated an already tense situation seeing imagined traitors where there were none.” Ranma folded her arms and turned back to Obito. “And you, young lady. Is there anything you can add to this? Such as why you were so far from home and safety in the first place?”

Obito finally made eye contact with Ranma and blinked slowly, eyebrows furrowing as if she didn’t understand the question. Sakuya’s exasperation grew, her career and everything she had worked towards for years was at risk and Obito couldn’t even follow the conversation.

“She must have been tricked into being there!” Sakuya burst out. “The Uzushio rebels must have thought she was of use with her Fuuinjutsu skills or something! Someone else must have knocked her out and helped all those kids escape!”

“The children you’ve named were all found at home with their parents, with their parents denying they were ever out of their sight today. We need a scrap of proof to get even one of them in for formal questioning.” Ranma reminded her, as if the old woman had anything to do with police work.

“I have proof!” Sakuya yelled, jerking forward as much as she dared, “They can look into my eyes and I’ll show them!”

“Oh yes, that’ll go down well: Uchiha hypnotised entire council into believing her pack of lies, in
other news: wood burns.” Ranma rolled her eyes. “Fortunately for both of you I have the matter in hand with the Hokage’s council. Your part in this whole awkward mess should be waved away without too much fuss. But I expect both of you to show your gratitude. You both have neglected your duties to the clan for far too long.”

Sakuya swallowed. This morning she thought that this case would be the thing that cemented her position as Fugaku’s successor to police captain, before Itachi or Sasuke were old enough to take over. She was a sergeant of the West police station, a highly decorated veteran of the 3rd war. She was a Jounin level shinobi and loyal Uchiha. Sakuya didn’t deserve being forced into marriage and breeding, just for her bloodline.

“Make Obito do it!” she heard herself say. “I’m more important, more useful. Make her have Izuna’s descendants!”

Obito eyes, her wide guileless black eyes snapped up to stare at her, too shocked to even show her hurt.

“I- I don’t like-. I can’t have children. I don’t like them. Obito’s easy, she likes everything, she loves babies. She can have them.” Sakuya babbled, before her guilt could silenced her. She had worked too hard to lose her job to a husband and a child. Sumiya would never agree to being a mistress on the side, she barely put up with being Sakuya’s secret lover. She’d never understand.

“I’m too good to waste on motherhood!” Sakuya hissed, her skin feeling odd and tight on her face. “My mother gave the clan five children so I wouldn’t have to deal with this shit!”

Ranma looked at her, and if Sakuya had though her anger had been icy before, it was now at at subarctic levels, her breath almost visible as she exhaled harshly. “You disgust me.” Ranma said shortly, looking Sakuya up and down. “The maternal line of Izuna has gone unbroken for five generations and you think your rank and that selfish trollop of a civilian is enough for you to neglect your first duty to the Uchiha? I never liked your mother but at least she has always been a loyal clan member.”

“Because she spread her legs whenever you told her to!” Sakuya screamed, the rage of a helpless child bubbling up to consume her fear for Sumiya, for her mother and herself. “She had to whore herself to whichever uncle or cousin you thought of suitable breeding, never getting the dignity or security she was owed. I grew up in a house of half-siblings and foster brats, watching her scramble to keep us clothed and fed, because your generation convinced her that being breeding stock was a worthy profession!” She was standing by the end of her rant, her eyes activated and spinning widely. “Obito is a matrilineal descendant of Izuna too! That’s why mom wants her married so bad, to spare me and give Obito a better life than you gave her!”

Obito didn’t show any surprise at that declaration. She didn’t show any emotion at all. It was as if Obito was so far removed, that the conversation had ceased to have anything to do with her.

Ranma looked at Sakuya like she was a misbehaving child again, sulking because the children of higher ranked parents got bigger portions of rationed food. “You will agree to do as you are told.” she said calmly. “Or I will leave you to deal with this situation on your own.”

“Alright.” Obito spoke up, her eyes still not focused on either relative. “I accept your terms.”

Ranma started to smile in triumph at Sakuya, happy that Obito had fallen into line and was agreeing to do as she was told. Her face froze, however when Obito stood up from her seat and hobbled away towards the door. “Where are you going, child?”
Obito knocked on the door before turning back. “I’m choosing to deal with the situation on my own. You just said I could do that.” she didn’t look at Sakuya, who was starting to feel faint at the words that had spewed from her own mouth.

“I didn’t mean you to-” Ranma stood herself, but the door was opened before she could step towards Obito.

“Lady Obito?” the Chuunin guard asked her respectfully, and Sakuya’s skin burnt and itched even more. When was the last time any shinobi had addressed an average Uchiha so respectfully?

“I think there’s been a mistake, Tetsu.” Obito said calmly. “I’m not an adult or an active shinobi. My Fuuinjutsu license means I fall under the jurisdiction of the Guild Leaders for suspected lawbreaking. Could you please arrange an escort for me to the Guildhall? When someone is free of course.”

Sakuya’s jaw dropped. Ranma’s shocked breath was audial to the room.

“Of course,” Tetsu tugged on his earring with a wide smile, “There are two Guild Leaders lurking down in the ground reception, angry no one will let them come up to get you. I can release you into their custody right now.”

“Thank-you Tetsu.” Obito smiled, the first smile Sakuya had seen on her cousin all day. No that wasn’t right. She hadn’t seen happy good natured Obito smile in a much longer than that.

“Obito!” Ranma called as Tetsu stepped aside to let Obito leave the room. Sakuya thought Ranma might argue, maybe order her little cousin back. But Ranma was far smarter than that. “I’ll make sure Kamo is cared for in your absence.” she instead said pleasantly. “I hope you come home before I’m forced to tell him where his beloved granddaughter is.”

Obito’s smile was wiped away at Ramna’s unvoiced threat and she slumped her shoulders as she left the room.

Ranma sat back down into her chair and sighed heavily. Sakuya remained standing, waiting for the yelling and threats to begin.

“You realise of course, you’ve just ruined any chance you might have had of Obito agreeing to have an extra girl for you to claim as your own.” Ranma said, eyes still closed. “All your mother’s efforts, her party planning, her networking and favor earning, ruined because of your loss of temper.”

Sakuya swallowed. “I grew up with Obito. I protected and loved her like a big sister. She’ll forgive me. She owes me.” she said hollowly.

“Believe what you like.” Ranma breathed deeply once more. “Now sit down so we can talk about your future while we wait for Obito to come back.”

Chapter End Notes

- The Uzushio Yakuza/Rookery totally turned up to rescue their kids and hide any evidence that they had anything to do with anything. They knocked out Tenzo with seals when he tried to stop them and Mitsubishi and Yashino dragged him away to safety. Tenzo is currently sitting with a comfy blanket over his shoulders and drinking honey water for shock while the Aburame clan debate what they should do about the
newly discovered mokuton user.

- I really hope I explained Obito’s new skills well enough. If chakra string is made up of pure chakra and the user has to continuously pump chakra through it to keep it working, then Obito realized she can manipulate actual thread like chakra string with much less chakra and concentration needed, because she’s soaked the stuff in her own blood and sweat already. It also means that eventually, she’ll be able to ‘sew’ seals into things far away from her, with a lot of practice and training. I tried to put enough foreshadowing into this that it’s not a random powerup.

- Izuna Uchiha was totally a transman in this AU. He had a kid or two to shut up the elders bugging him and his brother, but wasn’t like Obito, he utterly identified as male. Obito’s mom and aunt are his great-grandchildren, as is Mikoto, but that’s on the male side and doesn’t count as much. (Fuguki was supposed to marry Obito’s mom and have heirs with the right kind of bloodline, since he was adopted as the past Clan Leader’s son…. Don’t make me get the family tree out!) But since Obito is the only decendent of Baru’s line after Kamo she’s only been bugged about that side of the family before now. (Also why poor Izunami has a four-year-old kid when her oldest Sakuya is in her twenties, they thought Obito was dead and wanted more security in case Sakuya died too... seriously, I have this family tree all sorted out.)

- Next up: we meet the civilian side of government for Konoha at last. If anyone has any idea of how military government actually works or would like to tell me their ideas for how Konoha functions please let me know here or on my tumblr of the same writing name. Cause right now I'm envisioning a three-hour screaming match by people in fancy hats... Also Hyuuga drama finally concludes, Sarutobi get his five minutes of respect and Obito comes to a surprising realisation.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Obito gets herself out of trouble, muses about her situation and comes to the shocking conclusion that she doesn't like or trust her family very much. Shizune finds she has a moral line in the sand, which Tsunade just crossed. And two old people scheme against each other but not two you are thinking of. Oh and someone declares war but that's not the major revelation here.

Chapter Notes

It's still January! It's still early in the year! I'm not that late. Okay, I'm three months late. Sorry. Be overwhelmingly grateful Yulialeafhill beta-ed this so fast. And actually keeps track of what character's names are.

I'm coming up to the end of this part of the story. And I'm aiming for a tooth-rotting happy ending to. No more new plots or worldbuilding, just conclusions.

(my tumblr is jemsquash, I have yet to work out how to reply to messages, maybe just comment here instead)

Obito looked around the large store room, one that had been quickly rearranged to fit rows and rows of benches and seats. They were quickly being filled with men and women, formal robes hurriedly thrown over their work clothes in many cases, trying to subtly elbow themselves to the better seat. Obito glanced to her side, where two members of her veterans’ group sat clad in their own formal robes of their guilds. Old man Itsuo was scowling at nothing, work worn hands fiddling with Obito’s hospital issued cane, unhappy with it’s smooth handgrip. His own walking aid rested between him and the bird-like Kaiya, who kept twitching around nervously. The civilian governing body was far too busy to bother with a physical guildhall and Lady Kukabu’s biggest store room had been the best place they could find to host Obito’s hearing.

“You’re sure you can reinforce the entire arena,” Kaiya asked again, as Itsuo got out some kind of wax and started smearing it onto the bottom of Obito’s cane. “Before the next Chuunin exam?”

“If I’m not in jail or under house arrest,” Obito answered back, as she had before. “Otherwise you’ll have to agree to the Akimichi’s plans for a total remodeling.” She tried to clench her hands but the bandages and wounds prevented her once more. The barrier guards hadn’t had any medic nins amongst their own forces and she didn’t dare ask for a unknown medic near her in any case. The pain was bearable and helped her focus “How much longer do you think it will take for all the Guild representatives to arrive?”

Itsuo snorted, “We only need fifty to start the hearing officially. This is a fast turnout for an unexpected meeting.” He put away his wax and pulled out a rusty nail from the bulging pocket of his fur lined robe and started scratching it against the crutch handle.
“We just need to hope it’s the right fifty.” Kaiya said worriedly. “The Akimichi have got the builders and the brewers in their pockets and the bakers and cooks will side with them too given half a chance. I sent word to the scribes and the surveyors but they might not see the point in challenging the Akimichi.”

“This is a civilian court. The Shinobi clans shouldn’t have a say here.” Obito argued, eyeing Itsuo’s additions to her walking-cane worriedly. “Grandfather Itsuo, I will have to give that back to the hospital when I heal…”

Itsuo waved off her point, “I’m making it better for them, those idiots don’t have sense the gods gave chickens.” He fixed Obito with a stern look. “You’re a bigger fool than I thought if you honestly don’t think half the guilds work hand in hand the great families. It’s good business sense to have patrons with sizable incomes. I sent my children out to escort the skinners and butchers here before the Nara could poke their noses into the matter. If you do go to jail, it’ll be done the right way.”

“Your daughter carried the head skinner in over her shoulder,” Kaiya argued, nodding her head over to the still startled looking woman, her bloody apron awkwardly gathered in her hands. The chairs around her were all full as the storeroom reached it’s required number.

“That is the right way,” Itsuo said, finally putting away his rusty nail and blowing on the freshly dug grooves all over the cane handle. “Our way, not theirs.” he handed over the cane to Obito and frowned at her expression of thanks.

“I didn’t do anything wrong.” Obito instead repeated. “You shouldn’t need to call in favours like this.”

“Some of them will vote you guilty just for your family and former profession. We’re evening out the odds. I’m an Insurance broker. Trust me.” Kaiya said gently. “And you could still do those textbook seals for me, even if you do end up under arrest, maybe?” she added nervously.

Obito was spared answered that by the sound of a large bell being run at the back of the room. “We’ve reached the required numbers! Let the trial begin!” Someone in an overly feathered hat declared bringing more hush to the room.

Itsuo nodded to his three grown children and they slipped out of the doors as they closed.

“Don’t we need them here?” Obito whispered.

“They’re going to keep away any latecomers we don’t need mudding the waters.” Itsuo said calmly. “The trial needs fifty heads to start, but anyone can come in until the voting starts and we lock the door.”

“Someone can come in, having missed all the evidence and statements and still vote?” hissed Obito in disbelief. “That’s not very fair.”

“You’re a shinobi born and bred. You know life isn’t fair.” Kaiya nudge Itsuo into silence as the talking began.

* 

Konoha had been founded by shinobi clans, putting their grudges aside to try and build a safe base of stability and peace. But shinobi were not good at building. Or any craft not deeply connected with murder and deceit. Individual shinobi might have their own harmless hobbies or interests linked to mundane matters, but hardly enough real knowledge or skill to get a village of the ground and working.
And so, craftworkers, scholars and religious orders had to be enticed to come and actually make Konoha into more than a group of tents on rough camping ground. Senju Hashirama might have been the one that waved his hands and made towers and temples grow from the ground, but builders and draftsmen had been the ones that laid down sturdy foundations and convince him that tiled roofs and insulation were a good ideas. Uchiha Madara might have been the one who built up the wall atop the natural rocks of the valley and smashed the rest for building, but farmers were the ones that made sure the soil remained arable and capable of growing essential crops for the village. Uzumaki Mito might have been the one distributing resources and Fuuinjutsu but there had always been scholars nearby giving her advice. Senju Tobirama’s frantic holing up of the flaws in the ever growing village had always been done on the request and recommendation of sensible priests with their eyes on more than their enemies’ actions.

Few Shinobi clans liked to think of such facts. And fewer still liked to acknowledge the bribes and advantages the founding four had offered for talented civilians who gave their allegiance to Konoha. Such as the power to sentence any Konoha citizen not on active military duty to prison or death. It was a seldom used ability, but one that had in the past reminded the shinobi population that their village’s civilians were not harmless prey for them to push around.

It took a lot of time to get the entire gathering up to speed on what Obito was in trouble for, “She got shoved into a mud pit near the wall and now I have to waste my time giving her a slap on the wrist because the council’s a bunch of paranoid old men?” The head skinner summed up, wringing her bloody apron about with bony hands.

And even more time to clarify why Obito was considered an underaged civilian with a war veteran’s pension and a Fuuinjutsu license.

“She’s an Uchiha, she’s subject to military law. End of meeting.”

“She’s getting a war pension like non-clan wartime shinobi. She’s a civilian.”


“Let’s just vote her guilty and see how the council reacts!”

“And get a visit from the cops to my workshop? I’m not that stupid.”

Obito was trying to work out a diplomatic way to explain both the council and Hokage found her annoying and it suited her family to have her dependent on them under civilian laws, when a voice called from the back of the room.

“And who was your Master again, child?” asked a red-haired man. His Uzushio style yukata was neatly belted and presentable, as if the sudden summoning had not come as a surprise to him.

Obito slumped her shoulders, “Sannin Jiraiya is my Fuuinjutsu master…” she admitted reluctantly

“So: you’re a Fuuinjutsu apprentice to Jiraiya and he’s away again leaving us to deal with your accusation of… helping with a jailbreak?” The brew master looked around for confirmation. “I thought the Uchiha had the role of jail keepers taken from them three years back? What do you have to do with the jail escape?”

“The prisoner and his allies climbed the Village Boundary wall to escape. It’s supposed to be covered in protective Fuuinjutsu. I was the nearest Fuuinjutsu user to the wall.” Obito shrugged and swallowed her discomfort.

“That’s true,” One of the shorter guild leaders looked up from an open scroll, “I checked over our
civilian and shinobi register and accounted for every official Fuuinjutsu user in the village. Obito Uchiha was the only one off duty near the wall. The four on the wall were in pairs and in view of their squads the entire time.” He rolled up the scroll with two liver-spotted hands and eyed Obito suspiciously. “Why were you so close to the wall, Apprentice?”

“I was looking for someone. Some misplaced children.” Obito said carefully, trying to to pick out the few light haired, linen wearing Guild heads on the room. “I was trying to help their parents.”

“Is this really necessary?” Demanded one of the Earth Priests. “We all know this is a big power play between the Uchiha and the council. Why are we pretending to take this accusation seriously? Whatever we decide, it won’t really affect her or anyone else. Who cares if we strip an unlucky apprentice of her license or charge her with treason. It’ll just get overturned by the Hokage-”

“I care!” Obito spoke up, despite Kaiya’s hand on her arm tightening in warning. “I worked hard to get my licence and I’ve worked hard at the job I was assigned. The council doesn’t care one way or the other about my career, but I do! I’m proud of what I’ve achieved. This is my life you’re dealing with and it matters to me what you decide. You’re the civilian council, aren’t you? I’m a civilian now and for always, that’s what I’ve been told since,” she waved a hand vaguely over her scared face and missing limb. “I put my trust in you over my own family. Could you at least pretend to take it seriously?”

There was a silence and Obito thought her appeal had reached their old divided hearts.

But someone snorted in disbelief and the arguing begin a new. Obito slumped down in her chair and regretted standing up to Ranma. So what if Sakuya had turned on her, it wasn’t like she had had much of a choice. At least she hadn’t mentioned Kakashi, when Ranma brought up Sumiya. No force on earth would have gotten Obito out of Ranma sight if she knew Obito was on speaking terms and much more intimate terms with the only non-Uchiha bearing a Sharingan...

* 

Kakashi stepped out for the dawn shift of guard duty, still shaking away dreams of looming over a carpet of unending trees, nothing but open space before him, to find Shizune sitting on the Inn’s porch railing waiting for him. He had thought Shizune would stick close to her teacher, after Tsunade and Hizashi’s late night arguing had subsided into a silent contest over who could drink the most before passing out.

“I couldn’t sleep.” Shizune said softly as he shut the door behind him, not wanting to wake the rest of their group. “I had a lot of new information to sort through. A lot of realizations to deal with.” She looked like she was going to say something more, but she turned away to look over at the garden just beyond the porch. “And I wanted to see for myself, that you really managed to master the Sharingan.” she admitted with a shrug. “It’s supposed to be incompatible for a non-Uchiha to even tolerate it. But Yuuugao says you can turn it on and off at will now.” She looked back at his face, his grey eye almost a match for the deactivated black one in the still dim sunlight.

“Almost.” Kakashi said, walking to stand by the railing and scan the quiet view for any sign of trouble. He activated Obito’s eye to read the chakra around them and check the position of his team in the inn behind him. Hizashi was still in his room, unconscious from the vast amount of sake he had forced down. Jiraiya was awake and scribbling something in one of his notebooks. Tsunade’s snoring could be faintly heard, even with two doors between them. His teammates still slept, well trained enough to gather what sleep they could before the more serious part of their mission. “There’s still room for improvement.” Kakashi added, using hand signs to shut off the seal supplying his Sharingan with chakra.
“Rin used to say that, after every medical test we ever took together.” Shizune’s voice was fond. “She was never happy with her results, always wanting to do better…” She looked down at her folded hands. “Rin should have trained with Lady Tsunade, not been stuck on the fringes of the medic tents-”

“Tsunade refused to take Rin as an apprentice.” Kakashi sharply reminded her. “Twice she applied for the honour and was turned down. Minato-sensei asked on her behalf as well. Rin had no choice but to study on her own.”

Shizune looked away with a scowl. “That was before Lady Tsunade heard she performed a successful eye transplant in combat conditions. Tsunade wrote and asked for Rin specifically.”

Kakashi clenched his fists. That would have been after Obito’s apparent death and the end of the war, when they were both struggling to cope with the loss. “I didn’t know-” he began to say, taking the guilt of his teammate’s actions onto his shoulders. Of course Rin couldn’t follow her dreams. He was a wreck and she had felt obligated to look after him.

“I was glad when Rin turned down the offer and Tsunade was too insulted to ask again. I was so jealous of her,” Shizune admitted, still looking away to the view over the porch railing. “That she had made a name for herself, without a clan or family to back her. Just her own skills and hard work. I hated her for her success.”

Kakashi couldn’t understand anyone hating Rin. She was forever perfect in his eyes, a flawless martyr who died because of his mistakes. “She was doing what she needed to do. Rin’s place was in Konoha, not wandering around aimlessly-” he tried to justify her choices.

“Is that so? Then why did she die in Kiri on some senseless mission weeks after the war ended?” Shizune spat back, finally looking back up at him. “What was the point in our generation’s best medic getting killed on a misranked spy mission?”

Kakashi jolted back as if struck by her venom. Only the thought of his team still sleeping kept his killing intent incheck. “It was my fault.”

“Really?” Shizune slipped off the railing to stand. “You asked to go on that mission with Rin, with no back up and scant information? That was all your idea?” Shizune sighed and slumped, anger melting away from her frame. “I was comfortable blaming you for Rin’s death- everyone was. It was easier than actually asking questions, actually thinking about why the only medic to successfully transplant a Sharingan was targeted so. But when I heard rumours that Obito was back and he hadn’t tried to gut you in the street- I had to start thinking back to what I remember…”

Kakashi swallowed.

“Rin was pragmatic before all else.” Shizune shrugged. “Obito was the dreamer of your team, you always thought the enemy would react the same logical way you would and Rin was the realist. She sacrificed herself for you, didn’t she? Konoha medics are taught to kill themselves if they have techniques that can’t fall into enemy hands. She must have been hurt badly to have to use your jutsu to die, no chakra of her own to do the deed… it was a cruel way to die.”

“No.” Shizune had it all wrong, Minato-sensei would have never let them go on that mission if he knew the dangers they faced. It wasn’t some grand plot, it was just Kakashi’s incompetence and Rin’s nobility. “She had no choice. Rin… Rin saved everyone, she saved the whole village.”

Shizune laughed a hollow laugh, sounding like her teacher. “Did she? Like my uncle did, and Tsunade’s father, and your sensei. So many people so quick to die for the village, but it always needs
saving again.” Shizune looked around and took a step closer to Kakashi, lowering her voice. “Did you know Lady Tsunade thinks the title of Hokage is cursed? That anyone who aims to claim the name dies or is ruined by the ambition.” Shizune folded her arms, hands clutched tight at her elbows. “I used to think it was just bad luck, that we lead dangerous lives and it doesn’t matter what we dream of or what we do. Death will come for us all.”

Kakashi swallowed and refused to show his fear. The black months when he had been alone, when it became so easy to ignore the remaining few friends attempts to drag him out of his misery, those months still haunted him… He couldn’t survive another loss, not when he had come so far. “Why are you telling me this?” He demanded. Shizune tread near treason with her words, questioning the wisdom of saving the village, the reason for Rin’s death. Shinobi had been arrested and courtmarshaled on less.

Shizune shrugged. “Because I’ve been content to follow my master’s lead for years and let my own anger and envy blind me. Because Yuugao says you’re better than you were before, growing beyond your past and loss. And if you can do that, after everything the village put you through, shouldn’t I at least try to put aside my old petty hurts?” Shizune reached into her pocket and pulled out a letter. “I got a letter from Anko, the first one since before Orochimaru was driven out of the village. She’s healing too. Maybe it’s time I returned and see how Konoha has changed.”

“After this mission?” Kakashi clarified, a bit overwhelmed by Shizune’s sudden change of heart. She hadn’t been home since her Jounin exam six years back.

“After this mission. Lady Tsunade is going to need my help recreating Lady Chiyo’s personal poison.” Shizune pulled a face, “I don’t approve of this mission at all, but I can’t do anything but make sure it goes as painlessly as possible.”

Obito was dismissed from the store room, so that the representatives could speak freely about her accused actions and then vote. Obito couldn’t see how the civilian leaders could talk anymore frankly than they had already, but she went without a fuss. Either way they voted Obito would have more things to sort out once they made a decision. There was the matter of Turtle being held by Uchiha police. If they got her to talk, if they found out about half of the drama Obito had been up to behind their backs, then her family really would lock her up, regardless of what the guilds decided.

Obito slumped down on the biggest sack in the small room she had been escorted to and waited for her guard to speak. There had to be a reason the Fishing Guild head had volunteered to watch her.

“So you really are an Uchiha.”

“I did tell you at the restaurant.” Obito smiled humorlessly, “Here to find out where your daughter Gyosan went, Uzumaki?”

Takaashigani’s hair was greying but still recognisable as the same shade of bright red that Gyosan and Kushina had had. He looked behind him automatically as he responded. “My name is Tatumaki, not Uzumaki.”

“Sure it is. And you have no idea how a bunch of Uzushio kids worked out how to climb a wall made unclimbable by Mito Uzumaki?” Obito raised her head slightly, “Did the children tell you that part of their adventures?”

Takaashigani matched her nonchalance by seating himself down on a nearby barrel of ale. “You’re very relaxed for a girl facing the loss of her licence and tower job.”
“If I lose my license I’ll just have to adapt. They can’t remove my knowledge of Fuuinjutsu from my head, I’ll just start selling seals without their approval at a lower price…”

“The Guilds can make life difficult for you—”

“I doubt they can make it any more difficult than my own family makes it—” Interrupted Obito, with a laugh that was more of a sob. She sniffed hard, restraining the turmoil of emotions in her heart and looked over at Takaashigani seriously. “I suppose you want to talk about the kids—”

“You have no proof that any Uzushio child was in any way involved in today’s drama. Your family cannot produce the alleged missing reports and no one will believe them anyway.” Takaashigani interrupted her quietly.

“Even with Shiokaze in their custody and about to undergo interrogation?”

“Everyone knew he was crazy before he turned traitor and broke a foreign nin out of jail. No one is going to take what he says seriously, especially when your family is involved!”

“Because four years ago the Uchiha didn’t fight the Kyuubi, but protected the shinobi clan civilians, not the outer area with truly vulnerable people… is that why everyone hates us so much?” Obito tilted her head. “I wasn’t here for that. I was locked up in Iwa. But my grandfather showed me his memories of the attack, it barely lasted an hour before Mina—before the Fourth took care of it. Why is everyone so—so bitter about the attack? It was shitty, that we lost so many civilians and our Hokage but the village survived more than 4 years of war—”

“Because it was avoidable,” said Takaashigani gruffly. “The war was over, our new Hokage was young and dynamic! We had just begun to remember a life outside of war when that demon escaped its seal and ruined everything!”

“So you did know there was a jinchuuriki before Naruto,” Obito concluded. “Did you know it was Kushina, before the attack?”

“Attack?” The grieving father shook his head. “There was no attack. That stupid girl got pregnant and we told her to abort it, that she risked the demon escaping during childbirth. We offered her a choice of children to adopt, even a concubine for her husband so she could raise a child from birth. But she didn’t listen. Kushina never listened.” Takaashigani hissed.

“That’s not fair! Kushina was—”

“She was selfish and she doomed herself. We told her a jinchuuriki seal weakens during childbirth—Mito killed half the Senju when she gave birth to her daughter, they never fully recovered the loss of their nursery—But Kushina thought she knew better. And that husband of hers encouraged her!”

“Minato was a Fuuinjutsu master! So was Kushina! If they both thought it was safe—”

“Bah! A mongrel of Suna and Iwa, trained by a half-taught war bastard from who knows where! No one of that lineage could ever be considered a true master of seals.” Takaashi sneered.

“My teacher ended the war.” Obito said icily, “Armies fled at rumours of his presence on the battlefield. He mastered Fuuinjutsu no one could ever hope to wield.”

“Your teacher?” Takaashigani stood up at that, surprise passing over his face. “I thought all but Sakumo’s brat died during the war—”

“I came back,” Obito hissed. “Because my teacher taught me my life had value. Because he loved
his village and taught us all to do the same. I refuse to believe Minato and Kushina let her pregnancy go ahead without fail safes and protections in place. I’ve read their notes, seen their skills, I know how good they were.”

“You have their books?” Takaashigani relaxed into a casual slouch, “I’d be willing to try and get you out of this farce of a trial if you gave me back the works of my nation-”

“Save it.” Obito snapped. “Those books are Naruto’s and I will give them to him and no other. I told you. I don’t need your help. In fact. You need mine.” Obito smiled shakily. “When your Rookery were stealing all those missing child reports from the station, did they take into account that the ANBU has been confiscating our documents for years? We’ve gotten used to copying everything that gets processed, especially missing-person reports. I’m sure your people’s band of thugs thought to break into the Uchiha compound and hunt down the duplicates?”

Takaashigani looked at her steadily. “You bluff.”

“I’m not smart enough to make this up. I know my clan, I know how they act when one of our own is threatened, even the clan screw up like me. All they need is the slightest excuse and they strike out against all that threaten them.” Obito told him gleefully. “They have ample proof that your children are to blame for everything, the jail break, the wall escape, the accusation against me. The only question is: are you going to give them an excuse to bring up such proof?” she waved a hand, “My family are actually glad the prison break happened, we were greatly insulted when control of the prison was taken from us. We’ll probably keep the facts to ourselves if we can, just to keep the Inuzuka guessing how they messed up.” Obito brought her fingers together, rubbing her bandaged palms together. “But not if I get punished for the escape. You know how it is in families.”

Takaashigani’s tanned face went pale under his wrinkles. “You’ll risk ruining innocent children’s lives to save your reputation.”

“Those innocent children commited treason. Prison guards died because of them. You should have noticed what was going on with your own people, instead of picking at my family’s imagined faults.” Obito snapped. “I’m not suffering the consequences of your bad parenting.”

“So you want me to speak on your behalf to the other guild heads, get you cleared of the accusation?”

“No.” Obito frowned and looked down at her embroidered sleeve. “I’m almost sure I’ll be fine without your help. What I want from you is more important than than my license... “ she took a deep breath. “I want you to take in Naruto.”

“I’m sorry- what?” the side of Takaashigani’s mouth twitched. “I thought you just said you want me to adopt the jinchuuriki-”

“Why not?” Obito demanded. “You understand how Fuuinjutsu works, you know he’s safe to be around, not an actual demon but a little boy needing a home. He’s an Uzumaki-”

“He is the reason my family had to change our name!” Takaashigani said fiercely, “He is a walking target to the entire shinobi population. Kushina’s identity as a host was only known by the time she graduated and she still had to deal with constant kidnap attempts. Naruto’s identity is known by the entire village and by now every upper level shinobi alive! What lunatic would take such a threat into their own homes? No.” He insisted as Obito opened her mouth to argue. “I’ve lost my daughter today and my unborn grandchild. I’ll not risk my people too, even if you threaten to reveal every child involved in the prison break.”
Obito scowled and clenched her fists. She thought it was the perfect solution, putting Naruto with his mother’s people. If Takaashigani had shown the slightest sign of considering it, she could have offered him protection in the form of Fuuinjutsu and ANBU bodyguards. But it wasn’t worth it if Takaashigani wouldn’t treat Naruto like family.

“Fine.” She spat. “Then I want the ANBU under layers back. The ones Chokorēto Uzuki stole. And every bit of information you have on Mito Uzumaki’s wall seals. Because someone has to make sure your daughter doesn’t return one day leading an army of Ame shinobi.”

* 

“It wasn’t even that close a vote,” complained Kaiya as the storeroom emptied out. “I thought we were doomed when Jiraiya was brought up, but even the Temple representatives didn’t curse his influence too much.”

“The optimistic ones thought it meant that old pervert was mellowing out, if he took a disfigured girl with a protective family as an apprentice. The smarter priests didn’t want to risk the wrath of the Hokage’s student.” Itsuo assessed clinically. “And when Lady Kukabu voted for your innocence first, and the rest of the textile guilds followed, that was the end of it. No one wanted to risk their ire.”

“And also: I’m actually innocent of the charges.” Obito pointed out. “That could have something to do with them voting to let me keep my license and not face treason charges, maybe?”

The older war veterans scoffed.

“That’s not how the world works, dear.” Kaiya assured her. “Now let’s get some food into you and those hands seen to again. You’re bleeding through the bandages.”

“I would love to, but I have to get home. One of the elders made an unveiled threat against my grandfather. I have to make sure he’s alright and they’re not filling his head with lies.” Obito admitted. She didn’t like airing her families bad side but Kaiya and Itsuo had put their reputations on the line in supporting Obito. If she owed the truth to anyone, it was them.

Itsuo sucked in his breath disapprovingly. “Nice way for the police to behave.”

“You know Dear, if you wanted,” Kaiya paused and looked around the street, “If you wanted, we could find a place for you and your grandfather to stay for a while. Somewhere nice and quiet, just until things got sorted out—”

But Obito was already shaking her head. “I couldn’t do that to him. Kamo’s so confused these days, I can’t take him from his family. It’s fine.” She smiled weakly. “I shouldn’t have said anything, Ranma wouldn’t really do anything to him, she just wanted to make sure I came home safely.”

“Home isn’t a place you should be forced to return to.” Kaiya began to argue, but Itsuo put a hand to her arm and stopped her.

“Go back if you need to.” he agreed roughly. “Family is family.” He started to put out a hand, as if to pat Obito on the arm too, then stopped and cleared his throat awkwardly. “Until you realise it’s not anymore. Remember that, too, Obito.”

* 

Obito entered the Uchiha compound secretly, unlocking the clan’s basic wards and hoisting herself up and over the back wall easily with chakra strings. It was easy after everything else she’d scaled.
that day. Slipping between the houses, avoiding her family as she headed for Ranma’s underground archives, was slightly harder.

Obito was not a natural at stealth. Being seen but overlooked, that was her usual style. Having to hide completely was hard. Fortunately most of the Uchiha were in their homes, focused on their own lives. And Obito had worked with Ranma long enough to know exactly how to get into her archives and find the missing children records, the Uzushio Rookery would want. Her only issue would be-

“Hisssth!” Spat a grumpy watchcat, evil eyes and jerking tail the only things visible among all it’s white fur. A dozen more cat summons stared at Obito from various places amongst Ranma’s desks and shelves. Their judging looks reminded Obito of her family so much, she understood at last why Cat Summons were the only summon to have a contract with the entire Uchiha clan. Contempt called to contempt.

Obito swallowed. “I brought a bribe?” she said hesitantly.

The judging looks intensified. Obviously she brought payment, the question was: would that be good enough for them not to raise the alarm or go tattling to Ranma.

Obito carefully lowered the bulky blanket in her arms and released the seals holding in the strong smell of fresh tuna. As she unwrapped the whole fish from Takaashigani, the cats casually got to their feet and subtly started to crowd around her, each cat pretending not to see the others.

When the tuna was exposed in all it’s fresh glory the white cat finally deemed to speak. “If you’re gone by the time the fish is, we’ll forget you were ever here.” His fangs clacked together with what Obito felt was unnecessary loudness.

She nodded and darted for the upper shelves as the cats swarmed over the fish to pick it clean. She had the reports she needed tucked into a storage seal and was darting for the door by the time the back bones of the tuna were being exposed.

“Take your blanket back, it smells of dog.” a skinny tabby with a fisheye on one claw told her at the doorway. “You smell of dog.” it added when Obito used chakra strings to reach back and pull the quilt to her arms. “You always smell of dog now.”

Obito swallowed again and left, not having a response to the unspoken accusation.

* *

“Tessei!” Kamo greeted Obito brightly as she finally slumped down into the seat next to her grandfather’s armchair. “Father says we can go on the next supply run to Suna! Isn’t that great? You and me and Aso away from home for months! We’ll see so much- oh you’re bleeding.” he pointed to Obito’s bloodstained bandages. He leaned forward and whispered “Was it Yari again? Kita said he’s gotten worse since me and Kita got our Sharingan too. I think he killed one of my mouse summons.” Kamo’s old dry lips quivered, his long dead brother still causing him pain.

“No, it wasn’t Yari.” Obito sighed sadly. “It was something else. I’ll rebandage them in a minute.” she closed her eyes against tears. She had hoped so hard that Kamo would be in his right mind and able to give her some advice or comfort. Someone else was bound to arrive and lecture her any minute. Obito just wanted to talk to someone she could trust. Someone who could help her work out what to do next.

Turtle was still in Uchiha custody and Tenzo was missing. The Rookery had undoubtedly got to Shiokaze already and prevented him from revealing any Uzushio involvement in the prison break
and village escape. It would be nice to believe Danzo’s part in the plot would be revelled, but Obito had a theory the old man would escape untouched.

If Turtle talked about anything related to Obito she was stuck. The mission to Suna, her relationship with Kakashi, her new skills at Fuuinjutsu, her second Sharingan- Obito had more secrets from her clan than anyone else, she realised. Did that mean she couldn’t be too mad at them for thinking marriage was the only interest she should have in life? They didn’t know Obito anymore, not really.

Just like she didn’t know Sakuya all that well, if she was able to throw Obito into Ranma’s clutches to spare herself the burden of marriage and children.

Obito woke from her half doze when someone started unwinding the bandages on her left hand. She opened her eyes to see Mai, Shisui’s sister, kneeling before her, medical kit open on her knees. The older woman avoided Obito’s eyes, focusing on the exposed gash and welts circling Obito’s hands.

Obito stubbornly closed her eyes again, and ignored her hand being dabbed with various creams and ointment, then wrapped in clean bandages. She dragged a fully grown man back up the great wall to face justice. She stopped seven children from ruining their lives. She dealt with the consequences of her actions without her clan’s help. She had nothing to feel guilty about.

When Mai finished with Obito’s other hand she closed the medical kit, rose and left the room without a word. Obito looked over at Kamo, engrossed in a children’s toy of twisted rope and rings. She reluctantly pulled herself up out of her chair and limped into the kitchen on her now stiff legs.

There was tea brewing and a still steaming plate of food on the table. Mai was sitting, one hand playing with the curls on her forehead. Obito had never seen her so uncertain before, Mai always carried an air of boredom and disinterest. She’d never known Mai to be so quiet for so long either.

Cautiously, Obito levered herself into a chair and began to eat, watching her distant cousin out of the corner of her eye. The stew was good, the same old meal Obito had eaten twice a week growing up, more regularly when money was tight.

“So, Grandma came home worried today.” Mai began, her leg jiggling in time with her finger twisting in her hair. “Quiet worried, not angry worried. She’s gone over to your aunt, even though she swore never to cross her threshold again. And Sakuya’s still at work. Even though Grandma went to bring you two home from the Tower.” Mai twisted a curl so tightly her finger got caught in it and she had to use the other hand to free her finger. “We’ve got that fake ANBU in lock down but we have to wait for confirmation from the Tower that she isn’t ANBU before we can interrogate her properly. No one has any idea who she is, we can’t even get a name out of her….” Mai trailed off and went silent, her leg still jiggling nervously.

“You can go outside and smoke if you need to.” Obito suggested hesitantly, uneasy with how anxious Mai was acting.

“I would kill someone without pay if I could smoke.” Mai admitted roughly, finally stopping her movements. “Even one of those crappy war smokes we got in our ration boxes, I’d dig a dozen latrines for a single puff-“

“I think Kamo has a really old pipe and tobacco in his study?” Obito offered, confused to what Mai was after.

“And I’ve got half a pack in my pocket.” Mai admitted. “But I’m pregnant so…”

Obito recoiled from the table so fast, she almost knocked over her tea. “What the fu- why would
you-" She stopped, dropped her hands down from their defensive position and took a breath. “I mean, congratulations?”

Mai cackled. “Oh, Grandma is never getting babies off of you, if that’s how you react.” She smiled and started to look like herself again, confidence bleeding back in her eyes. “In a roundabout way, I owe you for this condition.”

“Me?”

“Well, after you shot poor Kaoru down so badly last year, she needed a bit of comfort… one thing led to another, and we led to it a few more times over the months. And we decided since she wants to think about finishing her corrective surgeries and the clan won’t let her until she got someone knocked up…” Mai shrugged and started playing with her hair again. “It’s not like I love my job or anything, I’ll stop work for a year, then Kaoru can look after the kid while she recovers from her surgeries. It’ll all work out.” The side of her mouth twitched up woulds.

“Sure.” Obito said uncertainty, settling back into her seat. “If you’re positive this is what you want. I just never pictured you settling down. And I didn’t know you and Kaoru were together like that.”

“I know.” Mai laughed a little giddily, “I always thought I’d have a random hook-up and dump the result with you or one of the other housebound cousins, only tell the kid it was mine when it needed to know.” Mai brushed away a handful of curls from her face. “But with Kaoru, it feels right, you know? She knows me, really knows what I’m like. And still thinks we can do it, be together and raise a kid.” She looked away, blushing slightly, then pursed her lips and made herself look at Obito defiantly. “Kaoru’s better too, when she’s with me. We’re stronger together and I don’t care what anyone else thinks. We’re doing this.” She said firmly to Obito.

Obito slumped down, resting her chin on her hand with a raised eyebrow. “And why I would have any opinion or say in this? Have a kid, have a dozen kids. No one is going to stop you. Certainly not me.” She sighed, “Maybe this will give me a minute’s peace, with you producing the next generation.”

“I doubt it. Granny’s obsessed with making sure the clan doesn’t lose the Kamui bloodline.” Mai smiled sadly. “Your family’s Mangekyou Sharingan is almost flawless. Shisui’s got his Kotomatsukami but it comes with a bunch of restrictions and drawbacks. If you don’t watch out Granny will start trying to set you two up together.”

“Ewwww,” Obito pulled a face, distracted from trying to work out what a Kamui or Mangekyou Sharingan was by the unsettling thought of being matched with Mai’s little brother. “Shisui’s a kid.”

“He’s a Jounin and rumoured to be the first Uchiha considered for ANBU on twenty years.” Mai shrugged. “You and I know he’s a little dork at heart, but to the rest of the village he’s a big deal. And in ten years the age gap between you two won’t matter at all.”

“I babysat him Mai. I used to sing counting songs with him” Obito complained.

“I remember.” Mai glanced down at her lap. “And soon I’ll get him to sing them for my kid.” A grin again wormed its way onto her face. “My kid. I’m going to have a kid, Obito!”

“Better you than me.” She said briskly, looking away. Mai’s smile reminded her of Gyosan and her boyfriend, grinning together as they ran from the village. There was another happy family in the making, if they managed to survive. Obito scowled to herself. It wasn’t fair. Why did a defector like Gyosan and cynical Mai get to have babies with their partners while Obito couldn’t risk being seen holding hand with her choice of lover?
“You’re incredibly bitchy for someone who managed to win an argument with Granny.” Mai noted with amusement. “Have some more tea, I’ll check on Kamo for you.”

“Thanks,” Obito mumbled and turned back to her mug. “And Mai? I’m happy for you and Kaoru, really I am. I’m just… tired.”

“Yeah, Inabi was telling some story about you being under suspicion for the whole wall escape? Which is so stupid. You’ve only been messing about with seals for a little while.” Mai stood up and walked to the door with a grin. “Let’s face it, your little sewing projects are nothing like the work of the four Founders.”

“Yeah,” Obito agreed hallowly, but Mai had already left the room, not hearing her uncertainty.

Obito swallowed and stared down at the tabletop, trying to mashel her feelings and thoughts into something concrete. How had things come to this, that her family was so utterly out of touch with what Obito could do, what she was and what she wanted?

She needed to come clean about her Fuuinjutsu skills, she decided pensively. The risk of losing her license had made her realise how much it meant to her, not to mention she had just unlocked a whole new level of wielding it. The way she had controlled her sewn seals without touching them- she had never heard of anyone ever attempting such a thing. She actually wanted to go to the Tower and sit for hours researching. Something her family would never expect her to do.

“Focus Obito.” she said out aloud, getting up to put her dishes in the sink. She needed to deal with the fallout she had had with Sakuya and Ranma, since Mai just told her Ranma was already busy plotting a counter-move. Obito didn’t want to think about what had been said, how it felt like Sakuya used her as a bodyshield against a fate she feared. A fate her mother Izanami hadn’t wanted, but been forced into herself… Had Izanami been resentful of her life, had she hated the children she had been forced to raise? Izanami was the closest thing to a mother she had had after her grandmother had died. Obito did not want to put any weight into Sakuya’s words, wanted to believe she had spoken out of fear and exaggerated her mother’s feelings. Izanami had always appeared to be happy with her life, if a bit tired and run down, over burdened with a few too many foster children. She had seemed so convinced that she was doing what was right for Obito, always pushing her towards marriage and motherhood.

Obito gave her head a shake and straightened herself up firmly. Obito had managed to save herself from Danzo’s plot before, she had managed to escape today’s drama with her licences and independence intact. She was not going to give in to Ranma, Izanami or Sakuya’s wishes for her, no matter their intentions.

A scuttling noise had her reflexly reaching for her knife and she turned to the kitchen door. Cautiously, knife held ready, Obito opened the door and found a tiny millepied stuck on the ground where the door had been, trapped in Obito’s anti-invasion wards.

She released the doorway seals, freeing the little insect’s many legs and watched with amusement as it scurried up the doorway frame, stopping when it was at the height of her shoulder. The tiny summons lifted the front half of it’s segmented body revealing a thinly rolled scrap of paper hidden between it’s needlepoint legs.

“I’m guessing you are from Mitsubachi or Anko.” Obito said with a smile, pocketing the knife and reaching out to gently take the paper. The millepied let her take it and then, job completed, let itself fall to the ground. It hit the ground rolled up tightly and vanished back to its own dimension.

Obito, closed the door, reactivated the seals and opened the note quickly, before Mai returned. It was
Yashino’s handwriting and the usual Uchiha shorthand. *Dogwood safe with Swarm. Swarm will hold Tomoki’s secrets.*

Swarm was code to Mitsubachi, maybe Yashino too. Tomoki was a term of endearment the Uchiha used for their children, and Dog-wood was probably the Dog masked Tenzo. So Obito didn’t have to worry about those three more or what they might tell anyone about what they had learnt during the fight today. And the Izushio group would remain quiet as well. Obito would keep the missing-reports hidden herself, as insurance. Maybe she could still convince one of the families to take in Naruto.

But for now Obito had to worry about what Turtle, Shiozaki and Sakuya could reveal. She could deal with that. She could handle everything on her own until Kakashi came home.

She took a deep breath, mustered up a smile and turned to go and check on Mai and Kamo.

* 

Obito left the house as soon as Kamo’s day carer arrived the next morning. An early visit to the police station and then to the Tower, would give her a chance to pick up any new developments in the prison and village escape.

But instead of finding the station quiet and staffed by only the small day shift roster, Obito found the station overflowing with family.

“We got the prison back!” explained Naomi at the front desk, while behind her the older police officers clapped each other on the back and congratulated themselves. Naomi’s appearance contrasted their worn-in out uniforms sharply, her uniform crisp and neat, down to the scarf Obito had embroidered for her wedding anniversary, wrapped over her shoulders with far more neatness than Obito could ever hope to emulate, “Old Kegawa Inuzuka resigned her post as prison warden in protest and the Hokage gave the job to Sakuya.” She grinned widely, “Everyone’s celebrating the victory.”

“Oh,” Obito blinked at that unexpected development. Sakuya had been in trouble for letting the prisoners escape yesterday. “That’s- that’s something alright. When was this decided?”

“Late last night. There was an emergency council meeting, we got the news less than an hour ago. I would have thought you’d be one of the first to know. Didn’t Sakuya rescue you from the escaping prisoners?”

“Sure.” Obito’s eye twitched in irritation. “That’s what happened. And how we caught one of them. Is she still in her cell downstairs?”

“We don’t have anyone in our cells,” Naomi reached for the front desk’s time file. “Everyone from last night was bailed out by the time I came on duty.” She checked over the records of the small jail cells attached to the station for short term incarceration. “No. No one is in the cells today.”

“Shit.” Obito took the file and looked for Turtle’s details. “It was a tall woman with face scarring over the eyes, very long light hair. She should have been brought in with Inabi yesterday-”

“Well, Inabi stormed off as soon as we heard Sakuya got promoted.” Naomi rolled her eyes. “He’s either at the training grounds or bar, I wouldn’t try asking him anything for a while.”

“Great.” Obito represent a sigh. Ambitious Inabi was going to be impossible to deal with if Sakuya had truly been given the prison warden job. “Two others were with him, maybe I could find them—”
“Obito!” came a familiar voice and Obito turned to see Sakuya coming out of Fugaku’s office, new stripes of her rank already on her uniform. Obito was aware of the others around her falling silent, all rising to stand at attention as the new Captain came up to the front desk.

“I’m so glad I caught you,” Sakuya said, bowing shallowly in response to everyone else’s formal bow. Obito gave a quick dip of the neck, eyes not leaving Sakuya’s. She had the strongest urge to reach for her knife and hold it defensively, against her closest cousin.

“Let’s go to my office and talk…” Sakuya put out a hand to lead Obito but she jerked away.

“Everything okay there Captain?” Naomi asked cautiously, looking at the cousins with concern. “Anything I can do?”

“Everything’s fine Naomi. Get someone else on duty at the front desk, there’s a stack of paperwork I’d rather you do than anyone else.” Sakuya said lightly, not looking away from Obito. “I’ll come and check up on you after I talk with Obito.” She stepped around Obito and started walking to her office.

“Yes Captain.” Naomi still looked worried as Obito sighed and followed Sakuya to her office.

The small room felt even smaller when Obito closed the door and faced down her cousin over a desk full of neatly stacked paperwork.

“Congratulations.” Obito said stiffly. “Who’d you sacrifice this time to get out of trouble?”

“Alright,” Sakuya sank down into her work chair and rubbed her forehead tiredly. “I had that coming.”

“You did. Now tell me where Turtle is.” Obito demanded.

“That woman tried to kill you, kill us both and flee the village with traitors. Why do you care what happened to her.” Sakuya asked, moving her hand to look at Obito in confusion.

“Because she’s a danger to me and I want to know who’s handling her,” Obito answered honestly. “She’s proof neither of us are to blame for anything that happened yesterday.”

“Oh,” Sakuya’s tired face brightened slightly, “I took care of that. Without Ranma’s interference. I made a deal with a council member and handed Turtle over for the matter to be dropped. I just happened to be in the room when Homura Mitokado came in to announce the warden had resigned and I made my case for the position.” She smiled hesitantly. “Everything is going to be fine now Obito-”

“Fine?” exploded Obito, “You think anything of that is fine? Danzo probably killed Turtle by now, there’s no reason for him to keep his word and you won’t last a day as prison warden before he makes up a reason to have you demoted-”

“Yes, of course Danzo would,” Sakuya interrupted her, “That’s why I made the deal with Koharu Utatane, not the openly anti-Uchiha war monger.”

Obito stared at Sakuya, trying to follow along with what Sakuya knew about Turtle and how her logic worked. “...why would Utatane want Turtle?” she finally asked.

“I don’t think she even knew who Turtle was, I just said she was an ANBU level fighter with knowledge of how to fight a Sharingan. That was enough to stir Utatane’s interest.” Sakuya’s smile grew across her face. “Fugaku confirmed my promotion and my pay rise. It’s enough that Mom can
give up half the children she looks after and still have enough money to live on. I’ll get Tekka and Nagaimo jobs in the prison too, no more irregular income for them either.” Sakuya nodded happily to herself. “It’ll all work out.”

“Until Ranma gets you back.” Obito snipped. “She knows about Sumiya, she went to your mother last night. She probably told everyone about your girlfriend by now.”

“Can’t do anything to me now.” Sakuya’s grin grew reckless. “I broke up with Sumiya last night.”

Obito sat down abruptly in the uncomfortable spare chair, uncaring of it’s stained upholstery. “You did what?”

Sakuya waved a hand. “It was time. I had lead her on for too long. It was wonderful while it lasted but-” she looked down, then up at Obito again. “I did a lot of soul searching yesterday, really took a step back and looked at my life. And the one thing that I knew with all certainty, was that I did not want to loose my career. I loved Sumiya, but-”

“Liar.” Obito interrupted hallowly.

“I did Obito! She was wonderful and I wanted to stay with her. But I had to pick between her and everyone else. It was,” she signed. “It was easy, once I thought about it logically.”

“Fuck logic!” Obito shouted. Then belatedly looked around, hoping no one was listening in. She glared at Sakuya as she dug out a privacy seal from a pocket and threw it down on the desk between them and and activated it with a push of chakra. She leaned over the desk glaring into Sakuya’s resigned face. “You were happy with Sumiya. She was the only thing that made you happy. Not your work, not your family, Sumiya. And that terrified you so much you jumped at the first excuse to break up.”

Sakuya opened her mouth to argue, but Obito hit her hand on the desk and carried on her rant. “You let your fears drive you, not your logic, not your heart. Your stupid petty little self-doubts. Ranma threatened you and you did just what she wanted!” Obito slumped back and blinked in realization. “She probably planned on this! You get a promotion, the clan gets the prison back and you dump your girlfriend. Fuck.” Obito stared at Sakuya, whose face had changed to panic during Obito’s revelation. “I can’t believe you just gave up like that. You’re supposed to be better than me.”

Sakuya glared at her, then turned away to stare at the wall, gathering her thoughts.

Obito stared down at her privacy seal, trying to work out everyone’s motives in the tangled mess of politics and love. Ranma wanted Uchiha power and Uchiha babies. Koharu was the teammate of her dead brother Kagami. Turtle was an agent of Danzo, proof he had not obeyed the Hokage’s orders to give up his secret army of ANBU. If Koharu got Turtle to talk, she had power over Danzo and the Hokage, who had defended his friend against Jiraiya. A win for Obito’s side.

Having the prison back under Uchiha control meant more power and more money for the Uchiha clan as a whole. More stability and less need to take high pay dangerous missions. Which meant in the more time to devote to relationships. Mai and Kaoru’s baby would be born just ahead of an internal clan baby boom. Izanami, relieved of financial woes with her children’s increased wages, would have more time to dedicate to them, encourage Sakuya and her brothers to marry. Hell, a year or so as Prison Warden might bring Sakuya around to the idea of actually having a kid, since her new job wasn’t so dependent on her body being at the peck of performance.

Poor Sumiya, Obito couldn’t help but thinking. She had given Sakuya almost two years of her life, only to be dumped at a moment’s notice because Sakuya got a threat and a raise. She deserved better.
“Maybe I’m not better than you,” Sakuya broke the silence, not looking at Obito. “Maybe I’m just better at being what the clan wants than you.”

Obito looked at her sceptically. Sakuya had always been far ahead of Obito, with skill, intelligence and drive. Their age gap was little excuse for how fast Sakuya had risen through the ranks during the war while Obito floundered despite everyone’s best attempts to help her.

Sakuya sighed. “I couldn’t weigh up the love of one person against the entire clan. Our family. What kind of life could we build together build? Without the guidance and rules and advice of them all?”

“A good one.” Obito whispered. She wasn’t really talking to Sakuya anymore. She was taking to herself.

“It’s done Obito. This is the decision I’ve made and I’m just going to have to live with it.” Sakuya drew herself up into a straighter poster, looking more professional and put together. “I did what I thought best for our family.”

“How nice for you.” Obito spat and stood to leave. “You gave up proof that someone in the village is training shinobi how to fight against the Sharingan, a chance to find out exactly how the prisoners broke into the prison you now have responsibility for. You dumped a woman who’s done nothing but put up with your hangups and love you. You threw me at Ranma to save your own skin—Kakashi was right, you do all treat me like trash!” She stopped at the door, turned back to grab her privacy seal off the desk. Sakuya grabbed her hand as she did so and stared hard into Obito’s face.

“I didn’t tell anyone what I found you doing with Hatake after you were kidnapped.” Sakuya hissed. “I kept your secret. I shouldn’t have said what I did, but I was panicking. I’ll make it up to you.” She let go and Obito recoiled away from her, seal clutched to her chest. “How did your meeting with the civilians go? I can go fix things for you if you want.”

“As I told Ranma yesterday, I can take care of myself.” Obito said and left the room before Sakuya could respond.

*

“This has gone on for long enough Hiruzen.” Koharu Utatane said firmly as the Hokage lay down his notebrush and wipe his hands clean of ink. “Danzo has openly disobeyed you! Kumo attacks us with their own diplomates! We need a show of strength and we need it now!”

Hiruzen looked indulgent as he put aside his work to dry. “You would have me declare war on Kumo? Execute one of our most respected elders? You sound just like Danzo at the moment. Should I check your office for signs of treason?”

Koharu ignored the subtle threat and pushed on. “I want you do do something! I do not court war like Danzo but I don’t fear confrontation the way you have since you re-took the Hat. This village is crumbling apart and it’s your inaction that makes it worse!”

Hiruzen looked indulgent as he put aside his work to dry. “You would have me declare war on Kumo? Execute one of our most respected elders? You sound just like Danzo at the moment. Should I check your office for signs of treason?”

Koharu ignored the subtle threat and pushed on. “I want you do do something! I do not court war like Danzo but I don’t fear confrontation the way you have since you re-took the Hat. This village is crumbling apart and it’s your inaction that makes it worse!”

“I have spent the better part of my life in this role, Koharu.” Hiruzen said placidly, which served to enrage her further. “I’d like to think I know what I’m doing by now.”

“And I’d like to think I’d never have reason to disapprove of your governing before Minato took office.” Koharu said, equally clam. “During the war years you were exemplary, the guiding hand of the entire village. I had my minor complaints with your decisions before now,” Hiruzen gave her a look of mild amusement, Koharu had always been his loudest upfront critic, Danzo preferring to keep their disagreements private and Homura generally let his thoughts be known in paper or
“The Aburame? Panicking?” Hiruzen interrupted in mild disbelief. “The Aburame do not panic. They reflect as long as they need to then act. Your spies must be losing their touch Koharu.”

“As must yours, since you still can’t tell me why Suna is on the verge of declaring war on Iwa. Or why Kiri has exploded into civil war.” Koharu hit her half clenched fist against the arm of her chair. “I thought the reason you allow Jiraiya to run wild is because he occasionally brings us back useful intel. Or was that just an excuse to put off his training for another year?”

“Jiraiya does important work for the village,” Hiruzen mildly argued, absentmindedly putting his hand over the drawer of his desk that Koharu knew he kept Jiraiya’s reports and books.

“Jiraiya needs to be properly groomed to take your role.” She hissed. “Or are you planning to die and leave him unprepared, the way Sensei did with you?”

A minute nose flare was the only hint Koharu had hit a nerve with her accusation. “I spent the past three years training my second successor—”

“And Orochimaru turned out to be a traitor who left bodies and a political mess behind him. I am still trying to clear that up with the Daimyo.” Koharu shot back, not gentling her words. “I am old and tired. You are old and failing the village. Pull Danzo back into line, start training Jiraiya and do something about Kumo. Or I will start maneuvering Shikaku into position as your replacement myself!”

“That’s a threat you won’t carry out Koharu.” Hiruzen said patronisingly. “You would never put the village in the hands of the Ino-Shika-Chou, the other clans would riot. We truly would revert to feudal times with a Nara Hokage.”

“It’s fast coming to the point were I have to decide whether I want a competent traditionalist or an apathetic moderate.” Koharu’s arthritic hands clenched again, almost into a proper fist. “I don’t want to oppose you Hiruzen. I’m proud of what you’ve done to make Tobirama-sensei’s dream a reality. Don’t let it all fall apart now.” She said firmly, summing up all she had wanted to say. The situation was almost out of control and she was almost out of strings she could pull to keep the village running smoothly while Danzo and Hiruzen played their games with ANBU. No one seemed to want to look ahead and see what needed to be done. The war was over and the village needed to move forward.

“Lord Hokage! Lord Hokage!” A genin slammed open the door, sweat dripping down his scared face. It was the young Umino boy that Hiruzen had taken under his wing. Koharu could only hope this one turned out halfway sane and competent, since he appeared to have little respect for the Hokage’s office. “The third Raikage is dead!” he announced waving in his hand one of the tiny scraps of paper Konoha used on their messenger birds.

Koharu snatched the paper out of the panting messenger’s hand, reading over the cipher rapidly. Her eyes widened with shock as she looked up at Hiruzen, who appeared unaffected at the news that his Kumo counterpart, one of the strongest shinobi ever known, was dead. Koharu felt suspicion and fear bubble in her chest, even as she ran her fingers over the back of the paper, feeling for the second cipher Konoha used, known to a select few.

Mission success. Suna blamed. There was more code that Koharu could not decipher, a message
only meant for the Hokage.

“Thank-you Iruka for such a fast delivery.” Hiruzen said in his doting father tone. It reminded Koharu of how Hashirama had spoken to them all on the day the Academy had opened, more than half a century ago. It made her want to punch something. “Please send word I will attend the midday Clan Head meeting, and they are welcome to invite the civilian guild representatives as well.”

“Yessir!” Iruka gave a fast bow and slammed the office door shut again, without so much as a respectful glance at Koharu.

She turned to glare at her old teammate, who was now brimming with good humor. “What have you done?” she demanded.

“What you wanted Koharu.” He held his hand and Koharu gave him the paper reluctantly. “Kumo’s attention has been diverted, as has Suna’s grunge against Iwa. We’ll soon receive a request for aid from the Kazekage and you can then get to the bottom of their motives.” He read over the message himself then snapped his fingers to set it alight.

Koharu stared at Hiruzen, humiliation washing over her. She had been a step away from treason and he had been plotting the entire time. “Nonetheless,” she said cooly, trying to recover her poise. “My point about Danzo needing to be reigned in and a successor trained, those points still stand.”

“Don’t you think, if ‘Lynchpin of the Daimyo’s treaty’ Koharu Utatane can’t find a better candidate than Shikaku Nara,” Hiruzen waved his hand at the thought of his youngest student taking such work on his reluctant shoulders. “Then I certainly don’t have a better choice in mind.”

Koharu didn’t waste her breath arguing again for one of her own former students or the one apprentice Homaru still had in service. Only the direct line of the Hokage’s students could inherit the title. She had written that law into place herself, years ago when Hiruzen needed to consolidate his new reign on the eve of war. Now her very own work was hamstringing the entire village.

“If only one of the Sannin’s students has half way useful.” she sighed, the fight abruptly going out of her old body. Hiruzen had won, like he always did and she would just have to keep things running until his next burst of competent leadership. “Or that Hatake boy showed any sign of thinking for himself and making healthy decisions-” she glanced to the side of Hiruzen, where her long dead teacher stared down at her from his inauguration portrait. “I actually thought he’d recover a bit when that teammate of his turned up alive, but now they’re just being indecent on top of everything else.”

The slightest change in Hiruzen’s breathing indicated she had surprised him. Good, she wanted a chance to get him back for his surprise counterattack against Kumo and Suna.

“I’ve seen the young idiots at the Hyuuga clinic, when I have my own appointments. I’ve never seen an Uchiha acting that open-hearted before but she’s really got the boy wrapped around her fingers. I’m not sure which family member is telling her to do so, but I’m about ready to really start interfering. I don’t want the boy completely broken when he finds out she’s pretending to care about him.” she mused out aloud, and again there was a sign that Hiruzen was startled. “What is it Hiruzen, surely you knew what your student’s student’s student’s were getting up to?”

Hiruzen stared at her for a long moment, then groaned and covered his face with one hand. “

“Koharu,” he explained tersely, “Obito is open-hearted. And incapable of thinking ahead about her actions and their consequences. Like Kagami- but without any understanding of how the world works.” He frowned at the memory of their old teammate, who never lived to see the end of the first war they had fought in. Danzo had never been the same, having his teammate bleed out in his arms,
a mere hour from the medic tents. If Kagami had lived, then Konoha’s day to day life would so much easier for both of them to keep under track of. “This is a girl who wanted to adopt Naruto just because he was the child of her teacher. I had to threaten her with blinding to get her to drop the idea.”

“That makes no sense,” Koharu said, as she took in the implications of what he was telling her, “Her clan knows there’s no chance any of the great clans would be allowed to adopt the jinjuriki. Mikoto did everything she could… and I know Ranma took Obito under her wing when she returned. Ranma hates the Hatake, she’d never risk let the boy marry in, even to reclaim the sharingan. And the bloodlimit clans are terrified of how dominate the Hatake genes are, there’s no point for the Uchiha to…” She trailed off, considering the interactions she had seen of the Uchiha girl at Mariko Hyuuga’s clinic.

Of course the girl was an obedient clan member, currying favour with the Hyuugas and civilian fractions in turn. Koharu had seen her flitting about, discussing matters of no real importance, only serving to build up her reputation in the eyes of the village at large. It had been the best move Ranma had done in years, gaining the girl so much goodwill she had won a vote for her innocence in the mess of the jail break. Sleeping with Hatake was just to get his council votes for the clan, which was why Koharu had made sure Obito remained a civilian and not able to join the council yet. It was also why she had made certain the girl got her Fuuinjutsu licence, hoping to distract her from the boy and minimise the fall out when he realised she was manipulating him.

“Hiruzen Sarutobi. Are you telling me two of Minato’s students, one of Jiraiya’s students now, are,” she lowered her voice to a hiss “acting independently?”

“I’m certainly not telling them to court.” Hiruzen assured her, “It’s a terrible situation. Obito has strange ideas about loyalty and child welfare. She got Jiraiya upset enough that he complained to me about Danzo. Gods know what she’ll make Kakashi think about.”

Koharu, a seasoned diplomat with numerous alliances and victories to her name, didn’t let any of her interest show on her face. She let her old teammate ramble on for a bit how no one understood the pressures he was under, all the while plotting her next move.

Danzo and Hiruzen would eventually destroy each other, one way or another. It was up to Koharu to make sure the village survived their downfall and that there was a competent, sane, ridiculously overpowered shinobi to take over. It wasn’t going to be Obito, but she might be the key to someone else rising to the challenge.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

In which Obito spends time on her birthday with people that actually like her and forcibly inserts herself in Hyuuga drama. Also, the Aburame is the one decent clan and Tenzo is getting adopted whether he likes it or not.

Chapter Notes

This chapter actually ran to over 30 pages so I cut it off before the actual party scene I aim to post the next chapter within two weeks. I don't know if you noticed this, but I have an awful lot of characters and plotting going on and I need to get everything to a neat ending.

Grateful thanks as always to Yulia Leafhill, who made sure I actually spelled names the same way throughout the chapter...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There was no escaping it. Obito’s eighteenth birthday came three days later, despite all the confusion and rumours linked to Chiyo of the Brewing’s murder of the Raikage. War between Suna and Kumo may potentially be on the horizon, but the grand party Izanami had insisted on throwing would still be held. The fact that Obito had not spoken to her nor Sakuya in days did nothing to hinder her efforts.

Obito started her birthday with just her grandfather, in his study going through his papers and mementos. There were photos and items that stirred Kamo’s failing memory briefly, drawing him back to the present or to a firmly fixed moment in his past. This led to stories of the past, of his siblings and the life he had lived among them, chaotic and ferocious. The twelve children of Nishino had lived through the early days of Konoha and took part of all the wars that followed plus all the minor conflicts they could find. Obito managed to work out what items were valuable and what she could safely give away when Kamo’s end finally came. The documents were of less interest to him but Obito sealed away what looked important into the storage seals sewn into her shirt sleeves.

“Tessai’s battle suit!” Kamo exclaimed, pulling out the old-fashioned armour from a familiar box. “We won it in a card game with Mori Kanden and she wore it till the end of the war non-stop. She used to go swimming in it rather than wash it by hand…”

“Lovely,” Obito remarked absentmindedly, glad to see her amateur repairs to the weaving weren’t blatantly obvious. Maybe she could approach one of the Kanden clan and see if they would show her the proper way to fix the tears she had caused while wearing it to Suna and back.

“And these are Toko’s boots.” Kamo continued as he rummaged around. “Why did he put them here and not by the front door?” He examined them closely. “And why is there sand in the treads? He isn’t allowed in Wind country since Elif made him kidnap her…” He put them by the study door, ready to be collected by his long-dead brother.
“How does a person make someone else kidnap them?” Obito wondered out loud as she put away the file she had been sorting through.

“Well Elif broke him out of his cell in the Kage’s palace, then carried him halfway across the desert. Toko only carried her the last mile home to make the marriage law valid…” Kamo grinned at the memory. “I like Elif, she tans and treats the best leather in the village, the Nara hate her for it!”

“Because the Nara finance with the tanners and skinner guild.” Obito nodded to herself, recalling the Guildhall meeting. “And the brewers and builders are supported by the Akimichi, so where does the Yamanaka loyalties lie?”

“Perfumers and dyers of course.” Kamo said. “Why else do you think they fight with the Aburame so much? They’re still using dragonfly scales for all their deep blue ink, even though the Aburame asked them to start phasing it out…”

“I didn’t know that.” Obito admitted, joining him on the floor with the box, “I thought the Yamanaka and Aburame were on good terms.”

“Flowers and bugs, roses and aphids, bees and pollen. You can be allies and enemies at the same time…” Kamo frowned and reached deep into the box, pulling out an elaborate hairpin, made of metal flowers with dangling uchiwas. “Honoka left her things here again. I told Rai not to bring her home, that girl is as flighty as they come.”

Obito flinched at his negative remark of her mother. “I’ll give it back to her,” she offered, reaching out to take it.

“Do,” Kamo agreed but did not let go of the pin, frowning at it. “She’s marked for Fugaku and she knows it, I don’t what Rai to get hurt.” Kamo looked guilty, “He’s been hurt enough by his parents.”

Obito gently pried the pin from his fingers and did not comment. The drama of her grandparent’s separation and the unsanctioned marriage of her parents was an old familiar tale. None of it was news to her, even the mention of Fugaku and her mother. Everyone knew Mikoto had upset many plans with her love match marriage to Fugaku and every other Uchiha branch liked to pretend they were almost the line that gave the Head a wife. It had little bearing on Obito’s life.

After that Obito got Kamo settled for a nap, reading out aloud one of his favorite definitely-not-romance novels until he fell asleep. Then she spoke shortly with his dayminder and quietly slipped out of the Uchiha compound for a working lunch with Kyoko. She had all the documents she had gathered from Kamo’s office in a storage seal and she hoped Kyoko could be convinced to look them over and explain to Obito what they meant. The Tower worker was always after Obito to take some initiative in sorting out her own affairs.

“Obito!” A voice called and she turned her head to see a delegation of Aburame solemnly walking down the street, all clad in their usual bulky coats and concealing headwear. It didn’t appear that any of the four Aburame had called to her, so she hesitantly approached, as most of the street drifted away. Groups of Aburame made civilians and most shinobi nervous. There was little anyone could do if multiple swarms went on the attack and subconsciously everyone knew that.

Still, the few Aburame Obito knew personally were some of the most placid and friendly people she had ever met and someone had called her name.

“Over here!” Between two of the Aburame was Tenzo, clad in very civilian looking clothing. “Help me explain,” he hissed as Obito drew closer. “They’ve got it all wrong. I don’t belong with them,” he looked adorably frazzled, an Aburame Obito knew well holding his hand as if he was a civilian
child in need of supervision.

“There are laws against forcibly adopting clan-less children you know.” Obito observed to Mitsubishi, as she fell into step with them.

“Correct, your clan is one of the reasons for such laws.” Agreed her uncle’s longtime partner, allowing Tenzo to let go of his hand in favor of grabbing Obito’s. “Fortunately, there is no mistake which clan this child belongs to, so we are helpfully returning him home.

“You don’t understand. I’m not a Senju!” Tenzo again tried to argue as they turned off the main road towards the oldest residential part of the village. He pulled on Obito’s hand urgently.

“You have the Mokuton. It doesn’t matter what name you were born with, as soon as it emerged you should have been given to the Founders’ family.” The shorter Aburame behind them said softly. “This is a custom older than the village itself. Children need to be with those who can help them control their gifts.”

“I can control it already,” Tenzo appealed to Obito, his small hand tugging on her own. “Tell them. Tell them I don’t need a family!”

Obito looked into the sunglasses of Mitsubishi, attempting to work out the Aburames’ motives. They had to know Tenzo had high level shinobi training and Konoha training at that. Therefore someone very important had hidden his existence from the village public. They could have quietly taken Tenzo to the Tower or even let him go, not risk bring attention to themselves.

Instead they were making a public spectacle of themselves and were about to make sure the Senju knew all about Tenzo, preventing anyone from quietly slipping the pre-teen back into the black op ranks. It was a decent move to make, even if poor Tenzo was going to end up a Senju. But a clan, even if it was the Senju, was far better than no family at all, wasn’t it?

Obito smiled reassuringly. “Everything is going to fine, Tenzo. You’re going to get a real home and family. It will be great.”

“I don’t need them. I have my sister: Yukimi!” Tenzo abruptly stopped walking and stomped his feet, wood bursting from the ground and growing up to his knees, binding him to the ground. He glared angrily at the five adults around him. “I’m not forgetting her again.”

“Child, we are trying to help you,” an Aburame in a visor and turban said in exasperation, summoning a clump of bugs to his cupped hand. “Don’t make me set the termites on you.”

Mitsubishi stepped between him and Tenzo defensively, their own handful of bugs swarming menacingly. Obito and the other two Aburame exchanged exasperated looks that a fight was so close to erupting.

“You said that your sister gave you back your name?” Obito asked softly, as the Aburame postered and buzzed amongst themselves. “The Senju will probably adopt her too. I don’t think they’ll even care if she’s your birth sister or not, they’ll want you to be welcomed.” The Senju would attempt to move the stars to have a Mokuton user again, whether he came by the ability through experiment or not. “Do you know where she is?”

“She’s in Cha no Kuni,” Tenzo said softly, his shoulders slumping as the fight went out of him. He looked at her closely. “What about my team? They need me to help them protect the village.”

Obito frowned, thinking of Kakashi losing a teammate he had such a strong connection with. She had seen their dramatic confrontation in the abandoned lab of Orochimaru, Kakashi storming Root’s
underground bunker to get Tenzo back. Tenzo thought ANBU was the only life he could have, after years in Root. That couldn’t be right.

Obito knelt down, looking at the boy levelly, “You are a child. A talented, powerful and devoted shinobi, but a child. After everything you’ve been through, everything you’ve done to serve Konoha, you deserve a chance to be a child. This isn’t the end of anything, you’re not going away. You are being given a home and family, who will treasure and protect you.” Or else, she mentally added. If the Senju messed this up she’d personally finish what Mito Uzumaki started.

“Honestly,” Obito admitted out loud. “It will probably only be a year or two before you’re back amongst Konoha forces. You’ll rise through the ranks so fast, you’ll forget you ever left. The Senju probably have a whole bunch of scrolls and techniques you could learn in the meantime.” If Tobimara’s Fuuinjutsu collection in the tower was any indication the Senju estate would be bursting with information relating to his studies of his brother’s Mokuton.

Tenzo sighed and slumped. “Okay, if everyone is so sure-” The wood around his legs started to flake and break apart. “I’ll go.” He said defeatedly.

“Great. And tell them about your sister, I’m sure they’ll work out some arrangement where you still see her. You said she’s in Cha? Where exactly? Which city?”

“Yunnan, with all the ruins” Tenzo smiled hesitantly. “She likes to possess people in the haunted temple…”

*

Obito had planned to show the documents from Kamo’s office to Kyoko over a working lunch, but that had turned out to be a surprise birthday gathering, taking over her favorite bakery. People from various tower departments and the couple of Genin Obito had used as errand runners mixed with her writers’ group and old war comrades.

The biggest surprise was Gai, who bashfully held out a brightly wrapped potted plant.

Obito flinched and stepped behind Anko who was in the middle of boasting about her new rank as a Tokubetsu Jounin. “I didn’t mean to!” she squeaked, “It was Iwashi and Uhei, honest!” The last time Obito had encountered Gai, he had made clear his objections to her relationship with Kakashi. Granted it had been after she had attacked Kakashi for circumstances beyond his control and she had agreed with him that Obito was a terrible human being. Things had changed since then.

Anko, craning her neck to look at her, uncertainty took a defensive stance against Gai. “You want me to kick his butt?” she offered, unaware of the impossibility of such an attempt.

“I’m here to rejoice in the continued survival of the beautiful flames of love and friendship.” Gai assured her, still holding out the big pot plant. His grin was wide and sincere. “A part of being youthful is being able to admit when he was wrong, don’t you think?”

“Ummm, sure?” Anko agreed, Obito still hiding behind her. “I’m just going to-” She took the pot-plant, wriggled her shoulders out of Obito’s grip and walked away quickly.

“I’ve had time to talk with my rival and he explained a few misunderstanding to me.” Gai told Obito solemnly, his voice uncharacteristically low. “I might have sprung to his defence a bit too hastily.”

“You made me cry more than when the Hokage lectured me.” Obito told him stiffly, arms crossed across her chest defensively. Behind Gai, in a quiet corner she could see Raido watching them with while sampling Mizuki’s homemade soda drink..
“And I’m not sorry I did that.” Gai said with a rueful look down to the floor. “Kakashi needs someone to look out for him. He’s very sensitive.”

“He is.” Obito agreed, then squared her shoulders and stood a little straighter. “And maybe you were right to lecture me. I didn’t want to admit how deep his feelings were. I’m trying to be more honest, with myself and with him.”

Gai nodded seriously, then gave a blinding smile and thumbs up. “And now let’s celebrate the flames of youth with a contest of arm-wrestling!”

“Let’s not because Kyoko wants the deposit of her booking back. Oh hey, there’s Abe from Research, why don’t you go talk to him. He keeps tortoises as pets you know.” Obito frantically waved at the researcher and when he waved back hesitantly, pushed Gai towards him without guilt. It was her birthday, she was allowed to avoid what complicated conversations she could.

She gave a wave to Raido, who subtly relaxed his shoulders, seeing he didn’t need to leap to her defence. Obito still needed to speak to all members of Minato’s bodyguard platoon, thank Raido and Genma for their attempts to keep Naruto and herself safe and maybe kick Iwashi in the shins for interfering in her business with Kakashi. But that was a duty for another day.

Obito found a seat near the surprisingly large pile of presents and spent a happy afternoon talking to everyone around her. She felt more energized than she had in days by the time people had to leave.

Asuma was one of the last to leave, lingering at her side until the last of the budget department left, leftovers stuffed in their bags. “I’m sorry to bring this up on your birthday,” Asuma said not sounding very sorry. “But I have to talk to someone about this.” He looked put out and angry, the way he usually did when he was about to talk about his family.

“Okay, what did your dad do now?” Obito asked, more of her attention on carefully adding her presents to her storage seals. Good quality notebooks and easy grip pens, a lot of vouchers for the various shops she bought her sewing supplies from. The budget department had printed her a large pile of proper business cards with an additional set of price lists for her various Fuuinjutsu seals. It made Obito feel like an actual grown-up.

“It’s the whole situation with Kumo. I just can’t get my head around how ruthlessly he settled things.” Asuma unloaded with a relieved sigh, “I mean, sure one life to save many. That makes sense. But it still leaves a bad taste in my mouth. It’s not like Hizashi had much of a choice in being used as a boobytrapped corpse-”

“What?” Obito asked, dropping her handful of birthday cards.

Asuma looked at her strangely. “Hizashi Hyuuga, Obito. The clan heads agreed we needed to appease Kumo by acting like we agreed to send their ambassador’s killer to them. There was a risk they’d discover Hizashi wasn’t Hiashi, or that they’d kill him themselves. But for us to outright kill and use him as a bomb- there’s no decency in that.”

“Wait.” Obito sat down abruptly. “Kumo said Suna poisoned their Kage. Suna is denying it but it was a poison only Chiyo could have used. Hizashi wasn’t a potion master, he didn’t know anything about medicine or poisons…”

“Think about who was just sent out on his first mission with ANBU in years. Who would Jiraiya need backup to confront, who is the only person known to be able to recreate a poison made by Chiyo?”
Obito shrugged her shoulders.

“‘Auntie Tsunade,’” Asuma hissed, tapping his nose. “It’s all part of my dad’s plot to get what he wants: peace through intimidation.”

“But Kumo will almost certainly start a war.” Obito pointed out hollowly, the facts Asuma was casually telling her starting to slowly sink in.

“Peace for him and Konoha then. Dad wants to buy us more years before we all go back to war again.”

“Shouldn’t he be working towards avoiding war altogether?” Obito demanded. “Why the hell does he think Kumo declaring war on Suna is a good idea for us. We’re Suna’s allies! They’ll cite the treaty and throw us at Kumo!”

Asuma pointed a finger at Obito, “Suna’s new daimyo is courting one of the Cloud daimyo’s nieces. He won’t give them the funding to fight a war. It’ll all settle down soon. I’m just pissed at him, that he’d pull this kind of shit again.”

Obito, caught up on how she was ever going to face Mariko and Neji again, didn’t respond to his woeful tone.

“I got an offer to go to the capital. Guard the Fire Daimyo as one of the Twelve Guardian Ninja. I’m thinking of taking it—”

“So your dad can have his own link to the Fire court—” Obito nodded absentmindedly, her heart aching for her friend. What could she possibly do to help them? Her clan had offered the Hyuuga an alliance to deal with Kumo, surely that would have been a better path than what the Hokage had done.

“No. So I can be free to live my own life.” Asuma argued. “I’ll be away from him, able to make my own way in the world. Not just be the Sandiame’s youngest son.”

“You honestly think the Fire Guardians would have offered you such a position if you weren’t the son of the Hokage?” Obito rolled her eyes. “Come on Sarutobi - you’re smarter than this.”

“What am I supposed to do then, Uchiha?” Asuma demanded. “I can’t stay under his thumb any longer. It’s too much. I want to be known for my own actions, not my dad’s.”

“Yeah, especially since he just organized the cold-blooded murder of a father to a four-year-old.” Obito spat, getting up. “Grow up Asuma. Some of us have it worse than a powerful father that’s always sheltered you from the worse dangers of your career.” She got up and walked away, out the door without thinking of anything but Mariko.

* 

The Hyuuga home was as quiet as ever, even with the entire clan housebound. Almost the entire clan, Obito thought bitterly, rapping on the side door she had always used before on her visits. Maybe Asuma was wrong, maybe he misunderstood.

Except. The Hyuuga had had a plan to deal with Kumo’s demands of repayment for killing the diplomat that had tried to kidnap Hinata. Except Jiraiya and Kakashi had left with Hizashi. Kakashi had been guilty and worried when he found out she knew his wife and child. Hizashi had asked her to look after Mariko when he said goodbye to her outside the Hokage’s office...
When Hikari finally opened the door, they were in a mourning robe, face lacking the sparkling mischief that usually lurked within their face. They looked surprised to see Obito.

“It’s not true!” Obito exploded at them. “Tell me it’s not true. Hizashi is not dead. He’s not. He’s just on a mission. He’ll be back soon!”

Hikari looked at her, holding the door half shut, then slumped and opened the door to let her in, looking defeated. Obito stepped in hesitantly and waited. Hikari just shut the door and leaned against it heavily, looking set to stand there forever.

“I’m going to find Mariko.” Obito announced pointlessly and left the unresponsive Hikari, walking to Mariko’s office. There were still Hyuuga bunched up in groups along the corridor, the children looking better than they had before, less scared and more alive. Some of the adults also looked like their worries had been solved. But most of them looked as if a terrible burden had been put on their sloped shoulders, not having the energy to do more than frown at Obito as she walked past them briskly.

Mariko’s clinic was spotless, scrubbed to an unnatural state of perfection. As if Mariko hadn’t been in here in some time. The air felt dead. The small corner, where Neji often slept or played while Mariko helped Obito through her physical theory, was bare. The bed and toys were gone, the floor polished and pristine. A shiver ran down Obito’s shoulders.

She stepped up to the back of the room and slid the shogi door open, revealing the walkway to the inner garden of the branch Hyuuga. Near a peaceful pond, that Obito had spent pleasant meals before, was Mariko. One look at her told Obito everything Asuma had told her was true. Hizashi was dead, at Konoha’s hands and Mariko had known what her husband walking towards.

“Where’s Neji?” she demanded, looking at Mariko’s deadened eyes. Any expression of sympathy or sorrow could wait until she could confirm her new fears were unfounded. Neji would just be with another relative, giving his mother space to deal with her own grief before telling him-

“They took him.” Mariko said softly, looking back to the depth of the pond. “They took my baby from me.”

“Who took him?” Obito demanded, walking over to her friend. “When?”

“My grandson has the great honour of living with the Main House from now on.” A serene voice announced from another doorway across the garden. It came from a woman with the same cheeks and chin as Mariko. Her smile was real and victorious. Her forehead was uncovered and showed the caged bird seal in all it’s distasteful elegance.

“They adopted him?” Obito asked in disbelief. “Neji’s part of the head’s family formally now?” It had been known to happen among the Uchiha, a talented child from one of the lesser branches adopted into the line of the head family. That was how Fugaku became clan head, taken in after the death of his parents when his talent for police work granted him an early entry to the police force. “ Couldn’t they have waited until after the mourning period? Let Mariko have him to grieve with, before Hiashi makes him his heir-”

Mariko gave a choked bark of laughter and covered her mouth with her hands. Obito turned back and wrapped her arms around her. Mariko didn’t seem to register her touch.

“That’s not how things work with us, Uchiha.” Mariko’s mother told her sharply. “My grandson has taken up his father’s role as bodyguard to the Hyuuga Head’s family. It is a great honour.” She said insisted, looking over Obito to her daughter. “We earn great honour with his service.” 
“Neji’s four.” Obito objected. “He’s four and his father’s gone and Mariko needs him.” She looked at the older woman, eyes daunting again to her uncovered caged-bird seal. “He should be with his family.”

“He is with his family. Hiashi is his uncle, he will train and defend Hinata-”

“The reason his father’s gone.” Obito summed up grimly. “Don’t argue, I know it’s not the poor girl’s fault but how else will Neji look at it?” She tightened her grip on Mariko. “I’m going to go get him, Mariko. You just wait here and don’t do anything… silly.” She glanced at the deep, silent pond, shook Mariko’s shoulder gently and got up.

“You will not Uchiha.” Mariko’s mother blocked her way back into the house. “This how a great clan functions. The sacrifice of one for the benefit of all. Neji will have the best education, the training he could never hope to receive from any of us. He has so much potential. This will be the making of him.”

“It will be the thing that breaks him.” Obito flicked her wrist, calling a thread from her sleeve and used it to grab the door and slam it shut between herself and the Hyuuga flunky. She sealed it shut, smiled at Mariko and ran back for the door she had come from herself.

Obito skidded down the corridor that linked the main house to the branch house, ignoring the voice behind her yelling that she had to come back at once. Obito dived into the first door she saw and again closed and locked it shut with a seal pulled out of her pocket.

The main house side of the Hyuuga building was far more empty than the branch side, both in terms of people and atmosphere. The floor had changed from wooden to marble and made the entire area much colder.

Adjusting her clothing, her false leg and her hair, Obito took a deep breath and forced herself to walk forward calmly, intent on her mission. Find Neji and take him back to his mother. It was the height of stupidity, taking a four year old from his already grieving mother and forcing him into the duty that had gotten his father killed. She just needed to explain this and a better solution could be arranged.

“I gave strict orders that we were not to be disturbed!” A loud voice declared, coming from several rooms aways and Obito started badly. Creepy all-seeing-eyes. “Tell me what made you think you could disobey and hope I agree with your reasoning!” The voice continued and Obito turned to follow the authoritative tone.

Obito went through three sets of shogi doors before finally arriving in a private training room. In it were three Hyuuga, two tiny ones on training gis and one elder, who did not have the decency to even turn and face Obito as she opened the last door and stepped in.

Before him, both Neji and Hinata had red eyes from crying and were panting hard from exertion. Obito’s hackles rose and she readied herself for a confrontation. She would take them both to their mothers given half a chance.

“Lord Hyuuga,” she said calmly, trying to control her anger at the state of the children. “I’ve come to request that Neji be returned to his mother. She needs him.”

The man didn’t start at the sound of her voice, just continued to watched the children. “I don’t see how that is any business of an Uchiha. Leave us in peace and tell who ever let you in to see me after dinner.” The man kept his back facing Obito and snapped his fingers authoritatively. Neji immediately took a fighting stance, turing back to face Hinata, who hesitated before shakilly copying him. Her face was as hesitant as Neji’s was blank.
“I am concerned because Mariko is my friend. Hizashi asked me to look out for her. She is grieving.”

“Having her son by her side will not bring back her husband. Better to make a clean break and let her start a new life without complications. Again!” he barked and the children sprang into a fast paced match of slaps and dodges. Even with her lack of knowledge of gentle first, Obito could tell Hinata was taking a lot of force with every blow she deflected and Neji was not holding back his strength at all. “I told you to leave Uchiha.”

Then Hinata tripped over her own feet and Neji didn’t pause in his strike for her shoulder. Obito was already moving to intervene. “Enough. You’ve won, leave her alone.” She grabbed him by the arm and hefted Neji up into her arms. “You’re done here.” She told him, uncaring of his hand still poised to block tenketsu points.

Neji squirmed wildly as he was picked up and settled on her hip. Then abruptly he burst into tears and flung his arms around her neck, shaking like a leaf. Hinata, still lying on the floor also started crying, though much softer.

“Who do you think you are!” For the first time, the elder bothered look directly at her and Obito was able to see that the Hyuuga resembled Hizashi very much. If Neji was his father in miniature, then this man was Hizashi in thirty years. Obito swallowed back mild nausea that the Hyuuga main house so clearly had a limited amount of genetic variety, that the former Hyuuga head looked so much like his son and grandson.

Hizashi would never get this old, Obito thought bleakly and recovered her resolve, glaring at the man, even as she awkwardly tried to lean over and help Hinata to her feet with Neji half-strangling her neck. “Who are you to make two children fight each other so harshly after such a tragedy in the family. Are you trying to punish them?” She retorted.

“It is my duty as the Hyuuga Elder to make sure these children overcome the weaknesses their fathers have passed onto them!” The newly revealed Haruka Hyuuga declared, taking a threatening step towards Obito.

Now further hampered by Hinata clinging to her bad leg and Neji attempting to burrow himself still sobbing into her shoulder, Obito gave Haruka her best look of scorn. “Great job. You want to follow up losing a son with more tragedy? Because that’s what I’m trying to prevent here.”

“You go too far-” Haruka raised a hand, chakra gathering in his palm.

Obito watched him and weighed up the cons of headbutting the Haruka Hyuuga in the middle of his own home, putting a protective hand to each of the crying children’s head.

“FATHER!” A new voice called and they all turned to see Hiashi staring at them, confderment on his face. “What is going on in here?”

“This insolent Uchiha invaded -

“Your father is encouraging your kids to pummell-”

“AUNTIE OBITO IS TAKING ME HOME TO MAMA!!” Neji screamed, over the noise of everything else.

Hiashi twitched an eyebrow. “Mariko specifically asked that we care for you while she puts things into order.”
“You honestly think she’d want her son under the care of the people responsible for her husband’s death?” Obito demanded incredulously, sinking down to her knees and hugging both children to her chest. “People who can torture him with a single hand sign?”

Hiashi flinched at her words and his father took the advantage to speak. “We are doing what is best for the clan. Neji will become a better shinobi with us, his mother realises that. Her grief is just clouding her mind at present.”

“Neji is a four-year-old child who just lost his father!” Obito yelled. “Do you honestly think making him live away from his mother, with a man that looks identical to his father but isn’t, is going to do him any good?” She kissed the head of brown hair to soften her words, then turned and kissed Hinata’s sweat soaked hair too. “They’re both going to crack from this unnecessary torture.” she prophesied.

Hiashi looked dumbfounded. Haruka was just angry. “The ways of this clan are not for a deformed Uchiha to judge! Put down the children and get out of my home.”

Obito flinched at the insult to her face and swallowed. “Your clan is the one that so intently divides itself. If Neji has the seal then he’s branch house and should live on the branch side of the house. With his mother. Those are the ways of your clan.”

Haruka opened his mouth to argue further.

“Enough.” Hiashi said simply and all fell silent. Both children choked down their sobs, leaving further trails of tears and snot on Obito’s shirt. Hiashi looked at Obito, taking in the sight of her resolved face and two children in her embrace. “Mariko truly wants him back? Her mother told me-”

“Her mother would have told you whatever you wanted to hear, wouldn’t she?” Obito interrupted sourly.

“I only meant to help.” Hiashi said softly, with a frown. “Hinata. Come to me.”

The Hyuuga heir wiped one more sniff of snot onto Obito’s shirt and reluctantly let go to walk over and stand at the side of her father, face lowered to the ground.

Cautiously, Obito got Neji to let go of her neck long enough for her to stand up, watching the Main house members.

“Neji may return to his mother. I will discuss his training with her another time.” Hiashi glanced over to his father and frowned. “I will discuss other things with her as well.” he nodded, more to himself than to anyone else in the room and left without further comment. Hinata trailed after him with a sad look back at her cousin and Obito. Obito tightened her grip on Neji’s hand and resisted the mad urge to grab her back.

Haruka gave her a single look, brimming with hate and followed, shutting the door behind him.

Obito let out a shaky breath and smiled weakly at Neji. “Let’s go see your mom, okay?”

Neji nodded, tears drying on his cheeks and placidly let her lead him back to the Branch part of the house.

He only spoke once they were in the corridor that connected the two parts of the building together. “Auntie? Did Kumo kill my father or Lord Hiashi?” he asked calmly, as if he were asking about the weather. “Because I want to avenge him.”
Obito sighed and stopped, looking down at the serious boy. "That sounds like something you should talk to your mom about, Sweetheart." she searched for the right thing to say, "But I think, for now, you should focus on what your dad taught you and how much he loved you. That's the best way to remember your dad and respect his memory. Not by killing, but by living. Does that make sense?"

“No.” Neji said softly, four years old and fully indoctrinated into the shinobi mindset. “That makes no sense at all.”

*

Neji was delivered directly into his mother’s arms, both of them weeping, and Obito found a sensible looking Hyuuga who promised to watch Mariko closely.

“It’s hard to do much to stop a medic-nin intent on doing herself harm.” Nishigo said matter-factly, as he led Obito to the door. “But we will make sure she knows she has support and love. Having Neji back is half the battle won.” He nodded at Hikari, who looked more confused than grief struck now. “Even if we have to suffer Haruka’s bad temper for weeks to come.”

“Sorry?” Obito offered uncertainty. The man had the ability to torture any one of the branch house, maybe she should have told him she had come over on her own initiative and no one else was to blame.

“Don’t apologise.” Nishrio smiled at her and gave a low bow. Hikari blinked and hurriedly copied him, bowing even lower. “Some things are worth suffering for.” he straightened up, nodded and walked back into the house.

Obito and Hikari looked at each other for a moment. Obito shrugged and turned to leave, just as Hikari flung their arms around her and hugged her gently. “Happy birthday Obito,” they murmured, “See you soon.” They pulled away and shut the door, before Obito could respond.

“Happy birthday to me.” she muttered to herself walking away in a daze. That had been an emotionally wrought time and her party still loomed.

She sighed and looked up at the sun, taking in its position in the sky. The afternoon was almost done and evening would soon be upon her. Reluctantly Obito started walking back to the Uchiha compound.

Behind her, the first of the Hyuuga shinobi slowly trickled out, back to work. Their sit-in was over.

*

Many kind souls had been to Obito and Kamo’s house and cleaned it, restocking the fridge and doing the many odd jobs a household needed done. This was out of the usual route, a special treat for Obito from her family to have a freshly cleaned and tidied house on her birthday.

A less kind soul had been in Obito’s room, leaving out the old fashioned under-robe one wore with a kimono. Izanami had wanted her to wear a traditional yukata from her own youth to the party and had taken out of Obito’s wardrobe any other outfit she could have possibly worn instead.

Obito smirked. Her family were becoming predictable in their pettiness. She had hidden the outfit she wanted to wear in her crowded sewing corner, hidden safely under the twice damned sewing machine.

Underneath the long length of blue silk Lady Kubaku had given her, some of it half sewn into hakama, was the kimono Obito had adjusted to suit her legs and measurements. It was a much more
modern style than any she had worn before, easier to put on and move in, with smaller sleeves and a simple pattern of small purple, blue and red flowers.

Obito looked at the rust coloured fabric and collapsed into her work chair, overwhelmed with the situation she had just gotten out of and the evening she was about to undergo. A party all about her and emphasising Obito was eighteen but not a proper adult by clan standards, not a shinobi or married or doing anything worthwhile with her life.

When she had been younger Obito always aimed to live a life just like the ones she saw around her: become a shinobi, marry Rin and make her an Uchiha, have a baby or two, train some students, become Hokage. The likeliness of all those things happening, of nothing going wrong in the dangerous lifestyle her clan devoted themselves to, had never really sunk in.

Absentmindedly Obito flipped through the nearest notebook, filled with her designs for quilts and embroidery, practise sketches of seals and general things she needed to remember or work on.

She stopped at a list she had written more than five months ago, just after her disastrous trip to Suna and official breakup with Kakashi. Obito had written it through a film of tears, convinced she just needed to make herself follow the Uchiha way and she’d be better off.

- Find someone to raise Naruto

Well that hadn’t worked out at all. Obito had asked after everyone she could think of who would be capable of caring for a young Jinchuuriki. Jiraiya refused, from bachelor panic and guilt more than anything else. The Uzushio crowd appeared to hate him for his mother’s alleged crimes. Any clan powerful enough to fight off potential kidnappers was too powerful for the village to risk an Jinchuuriki being raised to favor their clan over the rest of the village.

Obito had even spent a tiring evening trying to find out if Naruto could go into one of the temples as a novice. They had chakra training and understanding of Fuuinjutsu. But they were also pragmatic and wouldn’t suffer a demon crossing their threshold, even while sealed within a small boy.

“What lunatic would take a threat like that into their own home.” Takaashigani had asked. Obito still didn’t know.

-Watch out for Danzo

Since the Suna mission Danzo had seemed to keep his distance from Obito. Apparently he had other plots to work on, such as orchestrating a prison break just to trick an Ame shinobi and Uzushio children into sneaking one of his Root spies into Ame. Obito would undoubtedly now have to watch her back, in case Danzo found out how much of his plan failing had been due to Obito. It all depended on where Turtle was and if Koharu got her to talk. Proof that Danzo had not disbanded Root would be nice.

-Really try to be serious about marriage

Obito considered that old resolution. She had gone on a date with Yashiro. She had bit her tongue and tried to consider a life with Inabi, Osuma or even Karuo. But even during the time she had been apart from Kakashi and sincerely believed he was better off without her in his life, Obito had not felt anything near to the affection she had for him, for anyone else. In fact she felt distaste and almost hatred, when her family tried to push the issue. The thought of herself an Uchiha bride, something she had looked forward to as a child with Rin, now filled her with despair.

-Pass Fuuinjutsu exam
Obito added a mental tick to that aim. Goal achieved and license officially held on to despite all attempts to take it from her. Even when she managed to formally cancel her apprenticeship to Jiraiya, she couldn’t see anyone getting enough clout to demote her. Her seals were already too valuable as inexpensive aids.

-Become a Fuuinjutsu master in four years or less

Amazingly, that goal seemed to be in her reach as well. It would take work and research, training just as hard as any shinobi would to get to Jōunin level, but Obito thought she could actually become a master within the next three years. In the confusion of her return and recovery, her contradictory growth into an adult, Fuuinjutsu had become her refuge from depression and despair. Seals didn’t care what Obito was or wasn’t supposed to be, they just were. And Obito was growing in her understanding of them, her manipulating of them every day.

-Get private bank account. Don’t give clan access to it. Don’t let clan know you have it.

Obito’s bank account was growing by leaps and bounds. Her Tower pay might still be going straight to the Uchiha Account and mostly put toward her medical debts and upkeep, but her side work with sewing Fuuinjutsu paid well. She was getting faster in putting her stitches down and her reputation was growing among those who trusted her work. Add to that her share of the book circle was still bringing a small additional amount of money each month. Obito didn’t have a clue what she was going to do with this money, since she couldn’t bribe anyone to raise Naruto, but she had it and it made some small part of her relax, knowing it was there for her.

-Avoid Kakashi. Stop making his life awful

What she had said to Gai was true. Obito had had every intention of staying away from Kakashi and letting him lead a life without her messing in it. But first Iwashi had locked them in a room to talk out their issues and then Uhei had dragged her to Kakashi flat for further reconciliation. Now, as Obito read her shaky writing, she couldn’t see any point in trying to fight the inevitable. She loved him, in all the ways she could not force herself to love a fellow Uchiha. She hadn’t even been able to lie about it when directly asked by Kakashi. She wanted to be with him always.

Of course there was no solution to that problem. Kakashi wasn’t Uchiha, her clan would put a stop to their relationship as soon as they pulled their heads out of the sand and realised what she was up to and with who.

“Auntie!” a voice called, and Itachi knocked politely on the door. “You’re supposed to go to the sauna! They’re waiting for you.”

Obito put away the notebooks and smiled at the boy as he came in hesitantly. “Are they? Well, next time they should let me know ahead of time where they expect me to go.”

“But…” Itachi looked worried. “Ranma sent me. She and Auntie Izanami and Auntie Sanko and everyone. They’re gonna help you dress and do your hair and-” he waved at his face, indicating either makeup or a genjutsu over Obito’s scars.

Obito sighed. Weighed up the pleasure of a steam bath on her aches verse spending a vast amount of time in various states of undress while members of her family had her trapped and at their mercy. She glanced down at the clothing she had on, the dried out snot still clinging to her shirt. She’d have to change just to go to the sauna and then she’d have to fight to wear her own clothing instead of what Izanami picked for her. In the unlikely event of her winning the argument she’d still have to endure their input with her make-up and obi.
“Itachi-sweetie,” she said, an idea occurring to her. “Do you know what Izumi is doing today?”

“She’s helping her mom with the laundry so she can go to the party tonight.” Itachi said promptly, looking curiously at her sewing machine.

“Can you go ask her if she could come here in an hour or so? I’ll need some help finishing getting ready.” Obito reached into the storage seal in her left sleeve and pulled out the gift Kurenai had given her. A simple make-up kit in for Obito’s colouring plus a travel hairbrush. Because Kurenai, unlike some people, took into account Obito’s own taste when giving her things.

“But-” Itachi looked very worried. “They’re waiting for you at the sauna. They’re expecting you to go right now.”

“But it’s my birthday, isn’t it?” Obito asked him, getting up with her kimono. “And I have my own plans for today, which they didn’t ask me about at all.”

“But-” Itachi shifted on his feet, very uneasy with her disobedience. “Ranma and Izanami and Sanko. They told me-”

“Why do you think they didn’t tell me before they were going to help me dress, Itachi?” Obito said, getting out her only obi, a gold one with chrysanthemums. “I’ve seen them all the last few days but they never said a word. They sent you at the last minute without warning. Do you really think it was an accident they didn’t tell me?”

Itachi frowned seriously. “But they said-”

“They lied Itachi.” Obito dug out her megaré amount of hair pins. “They knew I wouldn’t want them to help me so they left it too late for me to argue, hoping I’d be too obedient to refuse. And they sent you because they knew I wouldn’t want to upset you and I trust you. They’re using you.”

“Like on a mission?” Itachi’s whispered to himself. “When you send a civilian to trick your target? I’m an accessory?”

“Not today.” Obito assured him, a bit taken back by the analogy he was using. “Because I’m trained for warfare too and I’ve got a counter move. I’m staying here and having a nice long shower, then Izuna can come and help me with my kimono and make-up.”

“I don’t like it.” Itachi announced. “This is just clothes. Not a mission.” He darted for the door. “I’ll go talk to Izumi.”

“Thanks,” Obito muttered and went to have the hottest, longest shower she could get away with.

* 

Despite the hot water and new fancy soap, Obito could not relax. The day had been so long already, with so much drama. She really didn’t want to go and deal with her family. There was no way that the evening would go smoothly. She would have to be on her guard the whole night. Sometimes her family was cruelest when they were trying to be helpful.

That put her mind to the Hyuuga, Neji and Hinata forced to fight each other while both were still traumatized by Hizashi’s sacrifice. Lord Haruka was a fool to think that would help anyone overcome their weaknesses…

What if the Senju treated Tenzo like that? What if they were worse? Obito had been so sure he was better off with a clan to support him, but what if they weighed him down. Tenzo had been through
so much already, he didn’t deserve a family that called him stupid or weak if he didn’t know how to fit in.

Obito breathed in steam, trying to calm herself. The Aburame had thought it was best for him. And Tenzo had the Mokuton, the lost Senju blood limit. He would be treasured, like all children should be. Tobirama’s notebooks had bits of conversation he had had with his brother. Hashirama had opinions on child welfare. That had to have come from somewhere and still remain within his clan.

Or else Kakashi would probably launch his own rescue mission. He really didn’t have a high respect of clans these days. And his mission with Hizashi would only have enforced his opinions.

Obito stopped in the middle of washing her hair and hit her soapy fists against her shower stool. Kakashi had gone on the suicide mission of a four-year-old genius’ father. He was going to be a wreck. Gods.

The water washed off the shampoo and soap as Obito sat and pulled herself together. One crisis at a time. She had to survive this evening first, then she’d work out how to deal with Kakashi’s resurfaced trauma. One step at a time.

*

Obito came out clean, mostly dry and in the under robe, to find Chiaki grinning at her. “I ran into Itachi on my way here,” she said, holding out a hand. “Izumi can’t come but I suddenly thought maybe you wanted to wear your mom’s necklace today?”

Obito stared at the slightly younger girl, the necklace she had given to her four years ago and abruptly hugged her. “What do you know about kimono?”

“They’re a pain, take ages to be put on right and we should all start wearing Bear Nation style wrap dresses? Chiaki offered in confusion.

“I can work with that.”

*

Eventually, with the combined efforts of Obito, Chiaki and Itachi; Obito was wrapped and tied in her chosen kimono, her hair tightly pinned up into a neat bun and her face made-up simply. Only the obi remained undone.

“I’m sorry, Mom always did mine for me.” Chiaki said sadly.

“Me too.” Itachi said softly, holding up the long gold fabric.

“I can tie someone else’s obi, but not my own.” Obito frowned, trying to think of who else she could turn to for help.

“Oh!” Itachi clapped his hands, dropping the obi. “I know! I’ll teach you the kage bunshin! Then you can do it.” He immediately went through a set of hand signs and with a burst of smoke had a second Itachi standing next to him.

“I thought that was a forbidden technique.” Chiaki said poking the new Itachi sceptically.

“Not so much forbidden as a technique most of the higher ups hate with a passion.” Obito told her. “It’s so easy to abuse and that Senju jerk came up with it. Show me the hand signs again.” she asked, activating only her original Sharingan. Chiaki did the same, both her eyes going red and spinning as
Itachi demonstrated the hand signs.

A few attempts later, and surprised by how much chakra the technique called for, Obito had herself fully dressed and ready to go. “How long will the clone last for?” she asked as she watched herself putting away everything.

“It depends on how much chakra you gave it.” Itachi said worriedly, bouncing on the balls of his feet. The fact that Obito had disobeyed orders was still playing on his conscious. “Maybe an hour or more? If no one pops it.” His own clone had fallen victim to Chiaki’s over-eager hairstyling, before she had to leave.

“So I could leave it with Kamo?” Obito asked hopefully. “I could still kinda have dinner with him?”

“Yes?” Itachi pulled various hair clips in his hair out. “I need to go, I’m watching Sasuke tonight. Happy birthday Obito.” He lifted his chin, indicating that that Obito could hug him. She did so with great enthusiasm, reluctant to let go and face the evening ahead. There would be no children at the party, just adults and her age mates.

Obito left her clone with her ever-fill basket of mending, trusting it would be able to do some of the simple sewing before it dispelled. Downstairs, Daiki the clan herbalist was Kamo’s minder for the night and he and his two youngest had set up a drawing table in the kitchen.

“I’m sorry you can’t come,” Obito said softly to Daiki as she put on her freshly polished boots.

“It’s alright, it’s not for us really. Just Uchiha.” Daiki said softly, bouncing his brown-eyed toddler on his knee.

“You are an Uchiha.” she corrected him, zipping up the left boot over her her prosthetic.

“No, I just married one.” Daiki grinned down at his laughing son, then looked back at Obito. “We’ll be fine as long as we get some leftovers from the party food.”

“I’ll see what I can- Kamo?” Obito asked as her grandfather abandoned his drawing to come over to her side. She stood up and as she did Kamo took out her mother’s hair pin and making her elaborate hair bun fall apart.

Shocked, Obito did nothing as he ran both hands through her hair, utterly undoing an hour’s work. With easy skill Kamo put the hair pin back in her hair, twisting one way then the other, until only the top Obito’s hair was done up and the rest fell freely. Her usual half-hearted curls had suffered from Chiaki’s extensive brushing and Obito’s hair now looked more like spikes tailing down her back than anything else.

“You look like yourself now,” Kamo said, then walked away mumbling to himself.

“Thanks Grandfather,” Obito whispered and left before she could start crying and ruin her eye makeup.

Chapter End Notes

Party scenes all written, I swear! I'm so looking forward to posting it, it's got the bit a lot of you have been waiting for.
Question: if I were going to show random scenes of Konoha's history from the Uchiha's point of view, what would you like to see? Which characters would you like to see interacting and what events do you think would have made a big impact on the Uchiha clan's development?

Also: I think I need to watch Shippuden for fanfic research. What's the most painless way to do so? I tried to load the Naruto Kai project from reddit where fans have edited out all the filler and flashbacks, but I can't convince my computer the files are safe...
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

The party had been going for less than an hour and already she was tired, every bit of energy and excitement gained from the afternoon gathering of her friends gone. There were so many other places she could have been tonight, other people she would have loved to spend her birthday with. Her war veteran group was meeting tonight, the workers in Lady Kukabu’s laundry wanted her advice on sealing the walls against mold, Granny Inoko had wanted her over for tea for ages...

“...hey Obito…” Mai said softly, disturbing Obito’s long list of people she’d rather spend time with, “I think someone at the window wants to talk to you…”

Chapter Notes

Comments please. I made a timeline for this mess.

Uchiha OC cheat code
Izanami - Obito’s maternal aunt and foster mother, birth mother to Sakuya, Nagaimo, Tekka, Yakumi and Iroaka plus foster mother to many other Uchiha.
Sakuya - Obito’s oldest cousin, one of the most talented nin of their generation. Just picked a promotion to prison warden over her secret girlfriend.
Mai - Shisui’s older sister, pregnant with Kaoru’s baby, granddaughter to Ranma
Ranma - unofficial elder of the Uchiha clan and behind the scenes manipulator. Sister to Kagami, grandmother to Shisui and Mai. Danzo, Hiruzen and the rest are wary of her.
Osuma - random background Uchiha, same age group as Obito
Inabi - rank climbing hunter-nin, what he lacks in talent he has in networking and cozying up to the right people
Kofun - older brother to Chiaki, son to the deceased Ema. Bit of a pushover but good with a bow
Kamo - Obito’s grandfather, suffering from dementia for the past year or so. One of twelve siblings, the only one still alive
Sanko - Mother to Naomi, unwilling grandmother to Fuji, one of Izanami’s fosters. One of the woman who feel they would be a better clan wife than Mikoto and takes out her bitterness on everyone she can

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Obito timed her arrival at the Uchiha meeting hall perfectly, arriving with the first of the guests, preventing Izanami from being able to lecture her on her appearance and ignoring her summons. Izanami’s three middle children: Nagaimo, Tekka and Yakumi all showed signs of enduring the blunt of their mother’s temper but the boys smiled and greeted Obito goodnaturedly all the same. They had done most of the work of putting out the food and tables, limiting their mother’s decorating attempts to subtle ones. Tekka proudly showed Obito all the painted Uchiwa his youngest brother Iroaka had drawn for table decorations.
Then Obito stayed busy by greeting the guests, a duty not as difficult as she had feared. The village drama of the last week remained on everyone’s minds, of what Kumo would do when they settled on a new Raikage. Add to that the prison break and Inuzuka’s resignation, leading to Sakuya’s promotion, meant most guests appeared to forget the original purpose of the party in favour of gossiping. This suited Obito immensely.

“Sakuya’s really done it now,” Osuma said accusingly. “Twenty-three years old and a captain, without a parent or teacher to claim credit for her achievements. Now my parents will never leave off nagging me.”

“She’s too young for a desk job, someone else should have taken the warden job. Someone with experience.” The middle-aged Akina puffed up her own chest, making clear who she thought should have gotten the promotion.

“Sakuya was the one who negotiated the deal.” Osuma interjected loyally, changing his tune instantly. “I heard the Yamanaka almost got the prison before she stepped up. Did she say anything about who she’ll take with as her staff, Obito?”

Obito started to respond, when Ranma swept in, resplendent in her heirloom kimono, swaths of material belted and tied into place. Everyone stood straighter and waited apprehensive as the elder eyed them all.

“You look—” Ranma trailed off, taking in Obito’s entire appearance, from loose spiky hair falling down her back, to her make-up which was simple, a part from her eyes. Itachi had a steady hand but he was very liberal with the eyeliner. The old woman looked down, took in Obito’s modern kimono and wide obi, tied in the old fashioned style her grandmother had taught her, high and dramatic folds at the back.

“.like him…” Ranma shook her head and looked away. “All this time and the bloodline is still surprising me.” she turned back to Obito and sighed, “Never mind. Have a good birthday, Obito.”

And off the elder went, towards the drinks table, while the group exchanged confused and relieved glances.

“Poor Obito,” Shisui popped up a handful of treats. “This party is more about Sakuya than you.” He offered her one as the others continued their own conversation.

“I know and honestly it’s great.” Obito took a treat and put it in her mouth. “I hope it keeps up all night and no one asks me anything about my life or plans for the future. So what have you been up to, I haven’t seen you in ages.”

“You really don’t know?” Shisui asked in surprise. “I thought everyone knew.”

“I have a life outside of this compound you know, I can’t hear all the gossip.”

“Well.” Shisui smiled proudly. “I had my ANBU entry exam.”

Obito choked on her mouthful. “What?”

Shisui patted her back as he rambled. “I know, it’s so great. I don’t know yet if I did okay, the test was weird. I had to take a Genin and camp out, then there were these two groups of ANBU and we had to work out who to fight and what to do. I think me and Itachi did alright.”

“You took Itachi on an ANBU exam?” Obito pushed away his hand. “Why would you do that? He’s too young, you’re too young, you’re both babies!” She remembered Shisui sobbing in her arms over dealing with Orochimaru’s labs. And now he wanted to experience worse missions all the time?
“I am a Jounin, Obito. I’ve been one for years.” Shisui said stiffly. “I’m not a child. I’m almost fifteen. And Itachi was born old. We know what we’re doing.”

“But why do it? What could possibly draw you to being in the baby killer squad?”

“Don’t you know? The money, Obito. Do you know how much ANBU gets for a single mission?”

“Because it’s all soul destroying S-rank bloodbaths!” Obito exaggerated wildly. “No one would do them otherwise. You don’t have to-”

“I do!” Shisui hissed, leaning in. “There has never been an Uchiha in ANBU, ever. If I get in and do a good job, then maybe more of us will get in, and we can stop worrying about whatever they’re holding against us! ANBU are always taking our paperwork or questioning our work; once they see we’re decent they’ll knock it off and we can relax!”

“But why you? If they’ve never let an Uchiha in, then why are they suddenly considering a little boy like you?”

“I am not a child,” Shisui drew himself to his full height, and glared at Obito’s skeptical look. “I’m not.” He insisted, looking embarrassed. “I thought you- oh forget it.” And he stormed off, red on his cheeks.

“So mature.” Obito rolled her eyes and headed to a table for some water. She found Inabi there, sampling the different kinds of pastry. He was wearing the kimono she had adapted for him to wear at the first War Anniversary she had attended. The seals on it were amateurish compared to the ones on Obito’s own new outfit. Her Fuuinjutsu really had improved over the past two years.

“I’d have used a different topping with this, but it’s not bad. Nice texture.” Inabi remarked, offering Obito his plate of approved titbits. “You alright? I thought you and Shisui were two sides of the same blade.”

“Only until I say something he disagrees with, then he turns into any other prissy member of this family.” Obito moodily accepted Inabi’s offered food and picked at it.

“Ouch?” Inabi said lightly, accepting the truth in her words. “Thought you’d be used to it by now.”

Obito just muttered to herself and ate, standing close to Inabi and letting his profile hide her from most of the hall.

“I’m actually glad I can speak to you alone,” Inabi admitted, and Obito belatedly remembered Inabi was also a problem she had to be wary off. She adjusted her body language, moving away from him.

“I mean-,” Inabi sighed and gave his shoulders a shake. “Okay, bear with me. I’m going to try something different here and actually be honest with you.” He gestured to a quieter corner. Obito followed him, mildly curious. Inabi was a crafty suckup, but he was up front about it. And he had respected her decision after his refused proposal a year ago, moving on to other things and people.

“Look. I’m going to say something and I need you know it’s not a threat or plot.” Inabi took a deep breath, looked around and activated a genjutsu, hiding them both from view. “When you turned me down I was offended, I’ll admit it. I had all these grand plans to show you how wrong you were. But while I was plotting I kept an eye out. And I started to notice how much,” he waved a hand around, “stuff you have to deal with. Our family treats you pretty badly sometimes.”

“Sometimes?” Obito demanded, raising both eyebrows.
“Most of the time.” Inabi admitted, scratching his chin ruefully. “I started counting how many times people say some of hand insult or joke about you and it’s a lot. All the time. I did it myself without thinking, it’s so easy to do.” Inadi signed and tugged on his collar. “So I first want to say: I’m sorry. I don’t know why we all think it’s okay to put you down all the time but I’m not going to do it anymore. You’re not stupid and I think maybe you never were.”

Without warning Obito’s eyes watered and she had to swallow and blink hard to stop them tearing up. “I don’t know what to say.” she admitted. It hurt to hear her treatment verbalised, as if a protective layer of denial had suddenly been ripped away.

“There’s more.” Inabi put out a hand, about to touch her, then stopped himself and tucked the hand behind his back. “I wasn’t spying on you or anything creepy like that but… I know about you and Hatak-ack!”

Obito had a hand to his neck and a knife to his abdomen before he could finish saying the name. Tears gone, Shinobi training in full control.

“Who have you told?” She demanded, quietly amazed she managed to subdue Inabi so fast. Taijutsu was his best skill set, she shouldn’t be fast enough to win the scuffle.

“No one.” he wheezed.

“What do you want?” she activated her right Sharingan, staring him down. She wasn’t any good at mental manipulation, but she could make him experience some of her worse memories to buy herself time to escape-

“Nothing!” The knife pressed harder against Inabi’s clothing. “Okay something, but it’s only an offer, not a demand!”

“Talk.” Obito moved her hand and knife away fractionally, relaxing her eye to stop spinning, but keeping it red and alert.

“Look. Look. Look.” Inabi took a deep breath, squirming uncomfortably. “I’m not one for sincerity or plain speaking. But you’re actually pretty talented with people and making people agree with you. You might not be a good Uchiha but you’re a good person. I respect that. I can see why Hat-,” the knife pressed in hard again and he cut off the name, “-why he would like that. I still want to marry you, Obito. You’re sincere and kind and safe. Also for your bloodlines and council votes. But mostly for you. If you married me I wouldn’t mind if you had something on the side. Like Yashiro and Temeki. Or Kofun.”

“Who is Kofun seeing?”

“Aoi Rokusho. Not important.” Inabi waved a hand then held it out to her. “I’m serious about my offer Obito. I can give you safety and support. I’ll stop everyone from picking on you and let you live the life you want. Not what Izanami or Ranma think you should do.” His eyes were serious, his smile uncertain. “You could focus on your Fuuinjutsu and networking and someday be a council member yourself, instead of just voting as Fugaku tells you. All I would ask of you is to occasionally play the part of a dutiful wife and maybe, someday, help me raise a kid. We could adopt or you could have a baby and I wouldn’t care if it couldn’t be mine. I’d accept it and protect you both.”

Obito lowered her knife completely and stared at him blankly, Inabi’s words being almost too incomprehensible. Inabi knew she was sleeping with Kakashi. And he wasn’t yelling or threatening or blackmailing her? What kind of sick plot did he really have planned?
Carefully, Inabi moved away from the wall and gave her a cautious but sincere smile. “I don’t need an answer any time soon. I just wanted to let you know. Don’t let them make you think you don’t have any options; we can make our own. Happy Birthday, Obito,” He smiled softly, a vulnerable gesture that made him resemble the younger boy he had been, who had wanted to retire after the war to become a baker.

Obito took a breath, full of panic and suspicion, wanting to run and attack and beg Inabi to keep his fool mouth shut. The worse had finally happened and she didn’t know what she should do-

She deactivated her eye and let out her breath in a sigh so strong it ruffled Inabi’s hair. “I’ll think about what you said. Just- please,” she grabbed Inabi’s wrist. “Don’t tell anyone, alright Inabi?” She squeezed his wrist hard for a moment, hoping the or else came over strong enough, then let go and fled to the biggest crowd she could see in the room.

Mikoto, looking away from conversation with Sanko caught Obito’s eye with her own as she walked past. Mikoto gave a pointed look to Obito’s appearance, especially the hair and frowned, before turning back to her companions, polite smile pasted back onto her lips. Sanko glared at Obito openly, her daughter behind her gesturing to Obito frantically about something.

Obito, still nervy and disorientated, gave Naomi a confused look then turned to find her cousin Sakuya right in front of her.

“What was Inabi talking about with you?” she demanded, both hands fisted in the pleats of her hakama.

“Nothing,” Obito lied, with a step back. Obito recognised the black outfit Sakuya wore as a set she had sewn for Sakuya’s oldest brother and bit back an offer to quickly pin it in a more flattering style.

“Right.” Sakuya frowned. “I’m not giving him a place at the prison, so forget whatever he promised you, it’s not going to happen.” She looked away, then back. “And… Mom wants to talk to you. She’s really worked up by your appearance, you should have spoken to her before-”

“I was busy.” Obito snapped.

“With what? Amire said you left the house in the morning. Mom had to get everything ready for your party without help.”

“No one told me I was needed. It’s none of your business how I spend my time. You’re not my warden.” Obito turned to storm off, but Sakuya caught her shoulder from behind, thumb digging into her most prominent muscle ache.

“I’m trying to help you.” Sakuya hissed as Obito gasped at the pain. “You need to go to Mom now, before too many people notice your-” Obito’s elbow caught her in the breast and Sakuya reacted by pressing her thumb harder. “Would you listen to me!”

Obito reared back her head and the dangling uchiwa of her mother’s hair pin flew into Sakuya’s eyes. With a curse Sakuya let go of Obito and she spun around to confront her shocked cousin. “No. You listen to me! You don’t get to be mad just because I’m not willing to be your mother’s little doll for a single day! I didn’t ask for this party and I made that clear from the start. If Izanami wants to talk to me she can come and find me herself!” Obito declared, turning around and walking away from her flabbergasted cousin.

Most of the room avoiding Obito’s gaze and pretended hard they hadn’t seen the runt of the clan get the better of their newly appointed Captain.
Mai was sitting in a quiet corner, half finished glass in her hand. She raised it towards the crowd of relatives Obito had walked away from and smiled. “Nice one.”

“Should you be drinking?” Obito demanded, ignoring her remark.

“It’s only water. Kaoru put a genjutsu on the glass.” Mai waved it under Obito’s nose and the smell of beer made her eyebrows rise. She couldn’t detect any sign of a genjutsu at all, even when she examined it closely. Kaoru really was the best in the clan at genjutsu. Ranma would be happy to know Kaoru’s hard earned gifts would buoyant up Mai’s blood and perhaps produce a child that would match Shisui’s talents.

“Why are you pretending to drink? I would have thought you’d be telling people by now.” Obito asked, cautiously taking a seat next to Mai, mindful of their elaborate obi behind them.

“Meh,” Mai tugged on her kimono, making sure it didn’t bunch at her waist. “I’m not far enough along for that. Don’t want too much attention until I’m sure it’ll survive. Plus I didn’t want to steal your stagelight. But I see Sakuya’s done that already.”

Obito sighed and didn’t defend her cousin. Moodily she pulled a bag of sweets from her obi and stuffed a couple in her mouth. To go back to the food table any time soon would invite further confrontation. She needed to lie low for a while and let everyone’s attention return to other matters.

“So… did you intend to look like Madara returned to life, or is it a happy accident?” Mai asked eyeing Obito’s hanging hair.

Obito blanched and accidently swallowed her mouthful. She had to drink Mai’s water to clear her throat. “I look like who?”

“Madara Uchiha? Son of Tajima? That madman who made us join the village then abandoned us?” Mai took back her glass when Obito stopped coughing. “There’s a reason those of us with his wild hair keep it short or tied up. It’s a big statement, having those spikes swaying about the place.”

“What?” Hurriedly Obito took out her hair pin and started twisting all her hair together. “Is someone going to tell me I’m related to him too?”

“No more than anyone else? Madara didn’t have kids, you know that.” Mai put down her glass and took over Obito’s task, twisting her thick hair together tightly until it was rolled into a neat bun, then pinning it up. “He didn’t invent the hedgehog look, he was just the most famous member of the clan with it. Naomi’s hair is even more spiky than you but she uses hair tongs to straighten it. And Osuma just wears his short. There.” Mai nodded and released Obito’s hair, going back to her people watching of the room. “It looked good, but it was making the older crowd nervous.”

“Gods,” Obito patted her hair, trying to feel what it looked like. “That must have been what Sakuya was freaking out about. Why couldn’t she just tell me?”

“Probably because Izanami brought along her heirloom shimada set and wanted to lacquer your hair into a formal hair bun.”

“Fuck that.” Obito muttered, wincing at the time and effort that would require. That was probably why she had been summoned to the sauna, for the painful procedure of coating and heating every bit of her hair straight. Easier methods had been invented to dye and straighten hair, but did her clan care? Of course not, the old ways were alway better to their minds.

“What are you going to do when the speeches start?” Mai asked.
“Try and look forward to the dancing after it.” Obito said matter factly. Gods only knew what Fugaku would have to say about her. My first decision as clan head was adopting this brat into the clan and she has yet to prove I was right to do so… The first and last Uchiha to willingly give away their Sharingan and she refused to take it back… Our greatest failure and favorite emotional punching bag, is now eighteen. Marriage bidding begins now.

Obito dragged herself out of her negative thoughts and scanned the room, looking for someone she actually wanted to talk to.

“Ladies.”

“Keep walking,” Mai and Obito said in unison, not looking at the sleaze ball Uchiha that greeted them.

“...frigid...” Yashiro muttered, walking away towards the next group of women. With any luck he’d end up locked in a cella when he groped the wrong person again.

Obito admitted to herself if she had to pick a husband out of this sorry lot Inabi wouldn’t be the worst choice. And least Inabi didn’t hit on anything that moved...

“Where’s Kaoru then?” She asked lightly, trying to distract herself.

“She dropped me off, then went to work. She couldn’t get tonight off...” Mai darted her eyes around and leaned in closer to Obito. “None of the adopted in clan members are here. I think tonight might be the night you finally to go to the Naka shrine.”

“I’ve been to the shrine at the back Mai. I had to wash it all the time growing up. I made all the new protective covers for the cushions last year.”

“No you idiot, the real shrine. Underneath.” Mai nudged her and frowned when Obito kept up her look of confusion. “You really don’t know?”

“When has this family ever told me anything until they absolutely had to?” Obito said nonchalantly, even has her mind recalled one or two hints of the shrine over the years. Kamo had spoken of it before when lost in his memories, something about the shrine room that his older siblings had been allowed into and he had been desperate to know about.

“Well you’re in for a treat,” Mai said moodily. “Piece of advice: don’t do that thing you always do, where you do the absolute opposite of what any sane logical Uchiha would do.”

“No promises.” Obito bitterly muttered and lapsed into silence. The room was filling up fast, every one a dark haired, dark eyed relative in formal dress. Obito was the only one with pastel colours on her outfit, everyone else in dark colours of dark blue, red and black. Not very unusual for the Uchiha clan, but there were usually a few who dressed to their own preferences. Uneasily Obito questioned her wisdom in dressing with only the help of two children too young to attend the party or understand the numerous unspoken traditions of the clan.

The party had been going for less than an hour and already she was tired, every bit of energy and excitement gained from the afternoon gathering of her friends gone. There were so many other places she could have been tonight, other people she would have loved to spend her birthday with. Her war veteran group was meeting tonight, the workers in Lady Kukabu’s laundry wanted her advice on sealing the walls against mold, Granny Inoko had wanted her over for tea for ages...

“...hey Obito...” Mai said softly, disturbing Obito’s long list of people she’d rather spend time with, “I think someone at the window wants to talk to you...”
Daiki’s oldest, ten-year-old Shiroka was tapping frantically on the window behind their bench, wearing sleeping clothing and a scared expression. He was saying thing something that could not be heard through the glass.

Obito opened the window and leaned out. “Sweetheart it’s cold, what are you doing out so-”

“It’s Grandfather!” Interrupted Shiroka barely containing his sobs. “He- he fell and he couldn’t get up or- or talk good. His mouth is all stuck and he’s calling for you!” Shiroka exclaimed hysterically, “They won’t let me in to tell you! But he’s begging and Dad can’t get him to calm down and-”

Obito was dragged away from the window by a yank on her obi, and Tekka stepped in front of her and slammed the windows shut, Shiroka’s yelling abruptly cut off.

Obito turned to find her aunt Izanami holding onto her obi, face white with panic and a false smile pasted on her face. “We’re ready to begin the speeches, come take your seat-”

“Kamo’s hurt.” Obito interrupted pulling out of her grip. “I’m going to go check on him first.”

“Obito!” Izanami grabbed her arms and looked right into her eyes. “This is very important. You have to go and sit now. Everyone is waiting. If you miss the speech, if you disrespect the clan, your whole future is ruined-”

“My grandfather is calling for me!” Obito interrupted again, speaking loudly. “The clan should understand, he comes first!” She pushed away Izanami’s hands and looked around frantically. Tekka had locked the window and was guiding Mai towards the set up seats at the back of the hall, both her cousin and Mai avoiding Obito’s face as they walked away. Most of the clan was seated facing the front of the small shrine, Fugaku standing next to it with an empty spot for Obito next to Mikoto. He was looking worried, Mikoto amused.

Obito took a deep breath. Shiroka could be exaggerating or misunderstood what was happening with Kamo. Her grandfather could just be disoriented and confused, not knowing where or when he was. Obito could race off to find him completely fine. She didn’t have to make a scene and blow off the entire clan.

“Darling,” Izanami linked her arm through Obito’s and lead her towards the seats. “It’s going to be alright, Kofun went off to check on Kamo, he’ll let us know if it’s serious. But you have to listen. You have to go down into the shrine and read the words, then you’ll understand everything and you’ll be respected. You can live a proper life and not need the outsiders any more. The clan will accept you-”

“Accept me.” Obito stopped walking, rooted to the floor. She stared across the room, eyeing every family member that pretended not to be watching the drama being played out. “I have to do more to be accepted? To be respected?” A taunt thread, somewhere in Obito’s mind snapped and a blaze of anger engulfed her.

She had been this angry before, on other’s behalfs. For the two sobbing Hyuuga children in her arms, for the lost Tenzo unaware of a life outside ANBU. For Itachi forced to graduate without ever understanding his classmates. For Naruto. Always for Naruto. Never for herself. Not like this.

Obito spoke, with calm she did not feel. “I have been a member of this clan since I was four. I was belittled and judged and mocked but I graduated the academy. My sensei was a future Hokage! I served in the war for four years, killed and bled with an Uchiwa on my back. I activated my Sharingan!” She jerked her hands towards said eye, spinning in rage.
Izanami flinched.

Obito the seated Uchiha were all turned now to look at her. Fugaku's frown deepened in confusion. Mikoto raised an eyebrow at her coolly. Everyone else was either shaking their heads fractionally, signaling that Obito needed to *shut up now*, or smirking and enjoying her tantrum. All reactions enraged Obito further.

“I suffered more than a year as a prisoner of war and I never questioned why none of you ever thought to confirm I was dead or make sure my remains were decently burned. I freed myself and crawled home to my family. Who gave me - what? A month of peace before getting right back on my case about EVERYTHING I AM AND DO!” Her scream echoed across the deadly silent hall.

“I claw myself back to health and strength and you give me a time limit on how long I can be free. I invented a new type of Fuuinjutsu and you all mock me for how slow and stupid I am. You keep me from getting a new leg and lock me in the compound like I’m a prisoner all over again! I fought off kidnappers and killed them all but who cares! I need to get married so you can use the votes the team that you assumed I’d die with gave me! AND you *never ever* tell me anything I could possibly use to be a valid member of this clan. Whenever I find out anything important you all act like I’m stupid not to have known without being told!”

Obito breathed deeply and stared down the entire room. “And now you say if I go and check on my dying grandfather I’ll lose your respect. Your acceptance? Keep it. I’ve never had it before and I don’t need it now.”

She turned her back, on more than half her clan, on every Sharingan bearer and more besides and walked for the door.

“Don’t you dare!” Sanko, Naomi’s ever bitter mother, grabbed at her hair bun and twisted Obito around to meet her eyes. Sharingan met Sharingan and Obito’s blazing rage met Sanko’s indignation and swatted away her genjutsu of mild compliance. Sanko flinched, but it wasn’t enough to save herself from Obito’s own genjutsu, formed of her worst memories of Iwa prison, thrown out into her eyes for her to experience first hand.

Sanko let got of Obito’s hair with a whimper and her hair bun fell apart, hair falling down in flowing spikes. Obito gave a triumphant glance back at the frozen hall, hair trailing behind her as she reached the door. She sensed Sakuya coming up behind her fast, but Sakuya was wearing a hakama that Obito had embroidered lovingly with all manner of protective Fuuinjutsu.

It was the easiest thing in the world, to reach out with her chakra control and active every stitch soaked in her chakra and take control of it, freezing the kimono, and Sakuya in it, to the spot.

“Obito! You don’t understand!”

“No.” Obito reached out a hand at Inabi, standing in one corner and watching in horror. The silk thread she had sewn into his clothing years ago, unthreaded itself from his sleeves and flew across the air into her outstretched hand. “But then, no one ever tries to tell me anything. So I’ll work it out myself. AS ALWAYS.”

With that dramatic shout, Obito let the chakra infused silk fly out of her hand and snapped the lock upon the entrance door, like a whip. The door burst open and Obito walked out into the darkness of the night, the hall behind her exploding into shock and indignation.

*
There was no moon to light her way as Obito hurried to her home. The sky was dark, few stars visible between foreboding grey and black clouds. Humidity hung heavy in the air.

Obito’s hands shook too much for her to attempt a jutsu to light her way and instead relied on her Sharingan to watch her steps.

She had fucked up. She had fucked up so bad there was no going back from it. She had insulted the half of the clan that mattered, had attacked family members, insulted the head to his face. Obito would never be forgiven for this, not even if she-

Obito reached her home just in time to see Kofun go in the door, so at least Izanami didn’t lie about that. She quickened her steps, heart pounding. Kamo would know what to do, he would help her, he was going to be fine-

At first Obito thought her hands were shaking too much to properly unlock the door. But after a few more attempts she realised that no, someone had blocked the door from the inside.

“Kofun!” she hit against the door. “Daikai! It’s me! Obito. Open the door! I’m here!” she yelled, rapping again and again against the wood. “Gods damn you. LET ME IN.” She hit the door so her her knuckles started to bleed as her panic set in. Kamo was hurt, he could be dying...

“Nononononononooooo,” she mumbled, trying the lock again and again. “This isn’t happening. It’s not…” She froze for a second, realising she had broken her key in the lock, then screamed and threw the broken half to the ground. “Shit!” Obito squeezed closed her eyes, still red and spinning, then opened them again and stepped back scanning the entire house… She had warded the house herself, she could undo them easily, if only she could get through the physical barriers.

Obito left the front door, grabbing Kamo’s old watering pot by it’s spout. She ran around the side, reached her bedroom window and hit the glass panes with the metal pot. One shattered but remained intact, held together by Obito’s seals. She hit the next pane and the next, breaking the wood between the glass panes too. Then she dropped the watering pot, released the seals protecting the room and watched the glass and wood fall apart. Obito climbed in through the opening she had made, uncaring of the glass shards and wood splinters on her hands and formal clothing.

She stepped into her room to face Kofun standing at her bedroom door looking incredulous. “What is wrong with you?” He demanded as Obito swept towards him, her obi knot getting caught and ripping on the splintered window. “Just... go away. I get Kamo’s memories, it was decided on ages ago.”

Obito paused, his words registering into the fog of her panic. “What?”

“Well- no one got Mom’s so…” Kofun looked surprised for a second then went back to anger. “You were there! You saw Chika couldn’t get Mom’s memories before she died. So Ranma said I could get Kamo’s to make up for it! You don’t need them! You’re not a shinobi or an adult-” he backed off as Obito’s killing intent rolled off her and swamped over his. Belatedly Kofun activated his Sharingan but it was too late to avoid getting caught in Obito’s gaze.

“Get out of my way.” Obito hissed and Kofun did so without hesitation, like an obedient puppet.

Obito stalked past him and down the corridor towards the sound of voices. She walked in the open doorway to find Kamo in his bed incoherently muttering and spitting, Daiki holding his hand and trying to calm him. They both looked relieved at Obito’s wild appearance.

“Thank all the kami of earth and trees.” Daiki breathed. “You made it.” The clan herbalist turned
back to Kamo and looked at his slackened face calmly, “You see Kanaya, it all turned out alright. Obito is here to see you off. You’re in good hands.” He squeezed Kamo’s hand with both of his own and let go, stepping away. “Thank-you for everything, honorable elder.”

“I- I don’t know what’s going on.” Obito stammered as Daiki stepped towards her.

“He’s had another stroke. A bad one. He’s ready to let go but needs to pass on his knowledge.” Daiki smiled at her sadly. “I think he only held on this long because he was waiting for you to be eligible to take them.”

Obito swallowed. “Yes. Of course. So- what do I do?”

“Go sit with him. I gave him something to orientate his mind enough to know what’s going on. Synchronize your eyes and chakra with him and-” Daiki waved a hand and left the room, shutting it softly.

Kamo yelled incoherently and reached his hands out to his granddaughter, drool falling from his slack mouth. His eyes were unfocused, his face blotchy and sweat covered his old grey pajamas.

Obito wanted to run from the disgusting stranger in the bed and never return.

Instead she smiled comfortingly at him, turned and put a chair to the door’s handle and sealed it with the strongest fuinjutsu she knew. Kofun would shake off her genjutsu eventually or Daiki would realise she wasn’t supposed to be the one here.

Taking a trembling breath, then another, Obito walked over to sit on the bed, took Kamo’s clawed hand in her own and pressed it to her cheek. “It’s alright Grandfather. I’m here. Sorry I took so long.” She activated her eyes, the one she had been born with and the one her loving grandfather had given her.

Leaning over his aged face, her red gaze met his flickering one, Kamo struggling to activated his remaining one. With gentle patience, Obito caught his gaze and matched his chakra, lending him her strength and focus to fully stabilize his Sharingan.

Red met red.

Red spun into a thousand shades, red turning to brown, to orange, to pink. And further colours blue and green and white and yellow.

And Obito fell into light.

*  

"Well, Little Duck," Mother whispered as they finally came to the very top of the hill. “Here’s our new home.”

Kamo sucked harder on his thumb and peered over his mother’s shoulders to consider the green valley below. Around them, the rest of their clan continued walking, their worldly possessions in carts and carried bundles on their backs like Kamo himself.

His oldest siblings were already halfway down the hill, running and whooping in excitement after long weeks traveling in near silence. Kamo, wrapped up in a sling on his mother’s back envied them.
“I don’t see why we all have to live here.” Muttered Kita, from his scrunched up place in the cart. Mother had been pushing for days. His triplets Tessei and Take were slumped against each other in slumber, but Kita was awake and pouting. “Father and the warriors have been living here for years, why can’t they just move back in with us?” Kita whined, pulling at the scratchy bit of his high collar.

“Lord Madara made it very clear this was always going to be the plan. First the warriors made it safe and oversaw the building of our homes, then the children and their carers would follow. The whole Senju clan have been living here for a year. We can’t let them think we’re any less brave than them, can we?” Mother asked, her soft voice a contrast to her weather worn neck and unkempt hair. Kamo reached out and swapped his thumb for one of her sweaty curls to suck on.

“Is anyone else looking at this giant hole fill of trees and streams and thinking we’re walking into a trap?” demanded one of the uncles who had his own set of toddlers balanced on each shoulder. “A perfect trap for a clan with tree growers and water welders to use against us?”

“That’s why I insisted on building the walls around the village myself.” declared an unfamiliar Uchiha with long wild hair trailing down his back. “I know Hashirama won’t raise a hand against us, but if anyone else does, we will know every safe route and bolt hole in the village grounds.” He said firmly, as those around him bowed as much as their burdens allowed.

“Or-” a voice from behind Kamo said consideringly “We could set that tower in the centre on fire now and not wait for the enemy to attack.”

The newcomer looked angry for a moment, before his face smoothed to resignation, “...The tower is fireproof, I checked. But then, so are our new houses. I swear to you, on my honour as Clan Head. We will all be safe here, every sacrifice we have made over the years will be rewarded now.” With an authoritative wave the man turned to lead them down the hill towards the settlement below.

“Who’s that?” Kamo whispered to his mother as she picked up the handle of their cart and began their descent into the valley.

“That’s Lord Madara. He looks after us all.” his mother replied, carefully guiding the carts decent.

“If he looks after us so well, why didn’t he send father to get us?” Kita demanded as the cart rocked him back and forth. “He could have brought the entire caravan here in minutes!”

“Kita! Hush!” Mother snapped, bending over the cart to glare at him. “You must never speak of your father’s eyes to anyone!”

“Feh!” Kita looked away, “It’s not fair…”

- - -

“That’s gonna to be be you on day if you don’t stop messing around,” Tessei whispered to him urgently as they watched their mother walk past them again, futilely rocking their newest sibling. Gyosha’s premature lungs made an impressive amount of noise for her size.

“Is not.” Kamo interrupted her, “I’m a boy.”

“Anyone who can’t fight stays home and nurses kunoichi’s babies so they can fight. You mess about with animal bodies too much and don’t train enough. You’ll never activate your Sharingan-”

“That doesn’t sound so bad.” Kamo interrupted her, “I like staying home with Momma and the babies.”
Tessei glared at him. “Don’t you want to be a shinobi like Father? I thought you liked it when he trained us?”

Kamo shrugged his shoulders. He liked the exercises but he didn’t like the tall man his siblings fawned over. Nishino Uchiha was very much a stranger to his younger children, rarely paying them any attention until they were old enough to be trained in the ways of their clan.

“You’re stupid.” Tessei said firmly. “I’m gonna get my Sharingan, then my Mangekyou Sharingan and then I’ll fight the Senju and become Hokage-”

* “I’m going to kill you!” Screamed Aso and Kamo ran from his eldest brother, fearing him as he never had before. Aso had new eyes, red eyes like their father and Kamo feared for his own useless black ones.

“Kita-Take!” he screamed to the two identical triplets, the two siblings who had encouraged him to take Aso’s prized battle axe and use it on the back garden’s target posts.

But he got no reply but the feeling of Aso’s hand just missing his shoulder as he zigged another way, into the next garden over.

“Tessei!” he futilely yelled, knowing his favorite sister was at the weird Academy the Senju had started.

“Just shut up and take your beating Kaya-” Aso cut off as Kamo jumped the next fence without thought and landed in the plot no one was to go into ever.

Kamo froze on the grass and didn’t move, too afraid he’d draw the attention of the owner of the lush garden. He was too scared to cry.

“Kamo!” instantly Aso’s voice changed from spitting anger to concern, “Otoute! Get back here before you get spotted!”

“I-I can’t” Kamo stammered, unwilling to look back at his brother. He had to keep his eyes focused ahead of him, in case he drew the attention of-

“Come here!” the creak of wood told Kamo Aso was leaning down over the fence, trying to reach him. “Just take one step back and I’ll get you out!”

“No, he’ll see me!”

“He won’t, I promise!”

Old Man Madara, seated in the dirt staring down at nothing, looked up and gazed right through Kamo, as if he was not even there. He sighed and looked away, even as Aso grabbed the scruff of his collar and hauled him back over the fence to safety.

“You need to be more careful.” Aso whispered as they walked away, a protective arm around Kamo’s shaking shoulders. “Old Madara- he’s not right anymore.”

* “—and finally I want you all to thank our new Daimyo for his kind gift of the entire surrounding valley to our village’s care!” The Senju head gestured happily to the unsure looking old man in
strange robes and hat.

Kamo frowned and leaned towards his nearest cousin. “I thought we owned the land already?”

“The Fire Court have old papers that say they own it, but we’ve been living here for ten years and ignoring him so, he finally gave up.” Norikura said with a shrug, running a hand over his freshly shaved head. Norikura used to be called something else, but he was a boy now that he was in the academy.

Kamo didn’t understand that either, he could see girls in their crowd of new Academy students but Norikura had insisted.

“I heard old Hashirama gave him a whole new flower garden in exchange for the papers…” Muttered Yari behind them, his voice worried. “And I heard old Madara was ordered to be at this ceremony. But he’s not here.” He took a deep breath, and Kamo could picture him fiddling with one of his many braids. “We’ll have to do our best to make up for his failings-”

“Right,” Kamo agreed absentmindedly, but he was already focused on other things. There were mandatory field medic training at the Academy and Tessei had already told him everything she had learnt from her classes. Maybe if he performed really well the Senju would let him learn their secret healing jutsu-

* * *

“Well?” The triplets pushed Kamo out of their way, eager to hear the news from their second oldest brother. “What was it like? Is it really scary? Scarier than being a scout runner for battle? Tell us! Tell us!” They demanded in unison.

The mystery of beneath the Naka shrine was one that intrigued all young Uchiha. They shouldn’t even know of it’s existence before they got their Sharingan, but the older children remembered vast amounts of dirt coming out of the newly built shrine hall. Soon after, several large wrapped items had been carried into it and never seen again. And now every time an Uchiha gained their Sharingan they had a special ceremony and came back with secretive looks on their faces.

Tsurugi, quiet solemn Tsurugi who came back from his first trip out of the village with a dying cousin in his arms and red eyes, smiled at his noisy siblings with pale lips.

Then he feel to his knees and threw up, right on their bare feet.

* * *

Kamo was still angry as he carried out the tea. He had gotten the highest marks in field medic class, but his teacher, some nobody without a clan, had accused him of cheating with the Sharingan. His outburst that the teacher would know when he gained his family’s eyes was taken as a threat and it had taken all of his and Ranma’s persuasion to keep the teacher from making a formal complaint. That was the end of any advanced classes for him in the healing arts.

“we need to do something about him!” Uncle Setsuna muttered as Kamo avoided his gaze and poured more tea for their guests. “He’s a disgrace to us all in this state.”

“That’s not for you to say.” Snapped Nishino. “Lord Madara is the reason you still have all your children. The reason we didn’t all starve. He forged the peace treaty that is keeping us all alive!”

“And we’re fine now! So time to move on. Before we get any softer than we’ve already become!”
“Why don’t we just - wait until he dies at least.” Murmured Kamo’s mother. “He’s lost everything else. Let him die thinking Konoha will last, before we move out again…”

“I thought Hashirama was supposed to be his great friend!” Kamo burst out, drawing the attention of the adults abruptly. “Why doesn’t he just heal Lord Madara if he’s so sick? Isn’t the Senju healing the reason we built the village? What’s the point in being here if they won’t heal us or teach us how to heal ourselves–”

Kamo’s mother slapped him before his father could, her softer blow all the more painful for it’s unexpectedness. “Get out of my house and run laps of the compound until you can’t run anymore!” Chihiro hissed, her eyes flickering to red for a long moment, “You do not interrupt adult conversations with stupid suggestions of exposing our weaknesses to the enemy!”

Kamo fled the room, holding back his tears until he was outside. His anger and hurt lingered for hours into the night, until finally Toko let him know it was safe to stop running and come inside to collapse. “You know she only did that to save you from worse punishment,” his younger brother murmured as he massaged feeling back into Kamo’s blister covered feet.

* *

“I dare you to go talk to him,” whispered Yari as they watched the Senju bastard sit at their father’s desk and look through the clan’s current reports.

“No.” said Kamo, trying to keep his voice level. Yari was always trying to get someone in trouble, but sometimes if you were firm enough he’d drop it and move onto another target.

“Go on! It’s your duty as an Uchiha to give him a hard time. He’s the one that murdered Izuna!”

“But he runs to Academy! I wanna graduate soon.” Kamo’s throat still hurt from his failed attempts of the Fireball Jutsu and Father would not let him leave the village until he could defend himself decently. Kamo heard the Nara were teaching others how to use herbs to heal. Mother still smelled of blood, even though the last baby had been buried weeks before. If Kamo could learn herbs instead of basic jutsu he might be able to help her.

“So go–” Yari shoved him forward, right on the bruises he had left on Kamo during their morning spar, “Introduce yourself!” and Kamo fell into the room, drawing Tobirama Senju’s attention.

Kamo froze where he was on the floor and kept his eyes down. Those that had fought in the clan wars still interpreted any eye contact with an Uchiha as a threat, even those like Kamo who did not have their Sharingan. “I’m sorry Lord Senju, I slipped–”

“Why does your clan use so much coal?” came Tobirama’s voice cooly, “My brother can give you all the firewood you could use but your clan insist on importing expensive coal.”

Kamo swallowed, trying to understand what the man was asking. So much coal? The clan was constantly complaining about how little coal they had to use, always running short of what they needed for the sauna and ceremonies.

“We- we try and use as little as we can.” Kamo said cautiously, daring to dart his eyes in the direction of his father’s desk. “But wood fires aren’t hot enough and they need too much tending–”

“What could you possibly need so much heat for? There’s always smoke rising from every home on your side of the village. I’ve had numerous complaints over the smell and the mess it creates, to say nothing of the risk–”
“We need to stay warm!” Kamo interrupted, visions icy cold bedrooms and freezing river baths overriding his caution. “Your clan took all the hot springs and we’re facing the West wind directly—” He caught his tongue, realising he was complaining to the Killer of Izuna and bowed low, forehead pressing the ground and stifling his tears.

*

No one cried as the small bundle caught alight, not even with the flames ate away at the paper covering it and revealed a heartbreakingly small hand.

Kamo forced himself not to look away, as he slipped his hand into Tessei’s hand and squeezed. Their little sister had been avenged before her body was cold, her eyes gently restored to her ruined face. It did nothing to take away the ache in their hearts.

“You’ll look after Mother while we’re gone?” Tessei whispered, as ashes started to rise through the air.

“Yes.” Kamo agreed, then dredged up the strength to speak further. “I need more money. Mother needs herbs only the Yamanaka sell.” What she really needed was for their father to stay away from her for a year or longer, but that wasn’t going to happen.

Tessei squeezed his hand and let go. “Tell me which herbs and I’ll ask Yari. He’s running patrol around their new greenhouses. He might be able to steal some.”

*

“Just what do you think you’re doing here?” Demanded Nishino stepping out of nothing to block the path of his oldest living son.

“I’m taking Kamo down into the shrine to read the tablet.” Aino said calmly, putting a hand to Kamo’s shoulder affectionately.

“Him?” Nishino looked at Kamo’s ever present herb bag skeptically. “He hasn’t been in real battle yet—”

“I got turned down for the hospital classes—” Kamo burst out, pulling away from his brother’s hand. “I did everything they asked, even the requirements they didn’t ask of anyone else. And they still refused to let me in the same room as their precious Senju heir!” His voice broke and his eyes were on again. He couldn’t get the trick of turning the Sharingan on and off, for all his training in chakra control.

“This is your great loss? This is what spurs you to greater power? A silly class for weaklings?” Nishino seemed more confused than angry.

“All my siblings are better fighters than me. There’s no chance I’ll ever make a difference compared to them.” Kamo admitted bitterly. “As a medic I could at least be different from everyone else!” And heal more than hurt, he didn’t say. He was angry but not suicidal.

Nishino smiled as Aino tried to reassure Kamo that the Sharingan would make all the difference to his abilities. “I’ve underestimated you, Kanaya. It’s that kind of vicious thinking that made me the legend I am today. Let’s go visit the shrine and see what you make of the legacy the Sage left us.”

*

Kamo strained his eyes, trying to read the stone tablet. It was dark and he was only allowed a single
The tablet dominated the space, its carved writing surprisingly hard to focus on, for all its size.

The first bit was hard to understand. Something about the moon and a power or an entity in the moon? Maybe it was a metaphor for how the Uchiha used the night to stalk their targets? How the moonlight especially made their eyes seem terrifying to their enemies? The Senju still whispered they gained their eyes by killing an innocent under a full moon... That was almost as ridiculous as the rumours the Uchiha spread that Hashirama was a woodspirit come to life by his mother's magic and Tobirama was her punishment, a child drained of all his colour by the brother that came before-

There was also something about a tree in the stone carvings but Kamo could not make himself go back to that sentence, His red eyes were drawn past it to the ominous words ‘curse of hatred’.

Kamo already knew some of the story. Strong emotions created the Sharingan, lose and fear and envy. Sometimes it was a sheer acceptance of death, witnessing it come to those an Uchiha loved. Sometimes, rarely but sometimes, the Sharingan was awoken just in time to prevent almost certain death. Or to witness it and have that death be the first memory to be completely engraved into their heart. It was always painful, but sometimes worth the pain for the gifts a Sharingan granted it's user.

The Mangekyo Sharingan was another story entirely.

* 

Uchiha and Senju eyed each other across the fire. The invading force from the mountains was on the other side of the river, pushed back by their battle today but still there, still a threat. Everyone was dirty and exhausted, with no weapons. And yet it felt wrong, to sit by the same fire and not fight their traditional foes. Lord Hashirama could talk peace until he was blue in the face but they would never forget the atrocities they had committed against each other.

Between the two clan groups, the few civilian graduates of the Academy shifted nervously, ready to dive out of the way when the scuffling started.

Kamo scowled and tried not to stare at Haiji Senju. In the middle of the battle, when Kamo had hung back to deal with any injuries his kin got, he had accidently treated her sprained wrist before noticing her clan symbol. These new flak jackets they were all forced to wear, they hid everyone’s identity and made it hard to keep separate in the middle of enemy action... The two young warriors had stared at each other in shock when they realised who each other was, then moved apart going back to the surrounding battle.

The leaders were a way from the fire talking to each other stiltedly. They had been forced by Hashirama to get along, or at least, not openly brawl. But the Senju Head couldn’t do anything to stop the younger clan members from feuding.

Kagami, the youngest Uchiha among them, cautiously reached into his collar. Everyone tensed up, ready to react to whatever weapon he was bringing out.

It was a den-den daiko, an old one that had seen better days. Slowly Kagami started to turn it, letting the attached pellets hit the drum softly. Next to him, Ranma glared at everyone, daring them to stop her beloved little brother making a noise.

Just as cautiously, Momiji Senju pulled a roughly whittled flute from his sleeve and started to pipe out a few notes.

Everyone avoided everyone else’s gaze as Kagami and Bokurama noises started to become a
recognizable tune.

It was a civilian born that began to hum, the rest softly joining in. Soon everyone was singing the song, the one about leaving home for the first time.

“In the deep dark hills of eastern Akaishi

That’s the place where I trace my bloodline~”

*

“not what Hashirama promised us!” yelled another clan member. The meeting hall grew even more unruly, everyone talking over everyone else.

Kamo focused on his baby brother in his arms, forcing another spoon of oil into his drooling mouth. He had traded three hours of fire jutsu practise to the Yamanaka girl for the flu mixture and he didn’t want a drop to go to waste. “The killer of Izuna is the new Hokage, not one of us! The treaty is broken and we should all leave!”

“The Stormlands are united under a single Raiding Lord, there’s plague to the East and that asshole Ishikawa just declared his new alliance the Village of Stone.” came his mother’s rising voice, echoing through their new hall. “If you want to leave the valley and face all of that alone then be my guest! My children and I will not leave Konoha!”

“You’ll let your wife speak to me this way Nishino?”

“When she speaks such sense, why would I stop her?” Nishino smiled proudly at Chihiro, who ignored him to reach across Kamo to Kita, who’s bandaged hand was bleeding again

*

“We’re not going to win this!” Setsuna yelled, as the ice around their squad grew and formed into dozens of mirrors, hanging in mid-air surrounding them all. “Sage curse the Senju to blindness, we were promised peace, not endless war!”

The fifty odd Konoha regiment had been ordered to hold the front against the psychotic Kaguya clan and they had done their best against the bone wielders. But they had been lulled into a trap, unwilling to accept the Kaguya clan could strategize or form an alliance with another bloodlimit clan.

The moment the clan of ice wielders had taken to the field they had been done for, their numbers and ability to jump through the ice they formed making them impossible to stop. Kamo’s medic tent had been abandoned, the wounded painlessly killed by the two Hyuuga medics he had been assisting.

“Lady Mito is tied up in the west, and Sarutobi fled the battlefield with the Hyuuga.” Hikaku said with resignation. “Madara bought us twenty years and this is where the village ends.” He pulled out his short sword and stared down at it. “Who needs me to stab their eyes for them?”

“You Uchiha are insane!” An Akimichi declared, his two teammates slung unconscious over his skinny shoulders. “Bite down your pride and at least try to surrender first-”

“Could- could you help me with Zuru,” a young Inuzuka said, cradling his whimpering dog. “His legs are messed up and I heard the Kaguya pull out the bones of their enemies!” He teared up as he looked down at his partner, “I can’t make myself save him. I should but I-”
Setsuna stabbed the dog in the throat fast, killing it instantly. “Done. Who’s next?” he asked briskly as the Inuzuka sobbed.

Kamo swallowed down a mouthful of painkillers and passed some along to his cousin next to him. This was it. Stab out his eyes, slit his throat, before the enemies could steal them like they had poor Tsurugi. He forced his shaking hand steady and thought of his dead siblings. They were all waiting for him on the other side-

The first wave of ice needles came through the ice mirrors in a single coordinated attack, with no space or opening to dive to. The Konoha squads were done for.

Then they vanished, before a single needle could touch them. Setsuna paused, his kunai point already in the skin of his eyelid. “Are you serious right now Nishino? You’re LATE!”

The laughter of Kamo’s father carried across battlefield, as a hundred ice needles again flew out of a dozen ice mirrors. This time they vanished and reappeared, flying back the way they had come, back into the ice mirrors. Screams and curses came from all around the huddled group of trapped Konoha shinobi.

The ice mirrors began to bleed.

*

Still sobbing Tessei raised her eyes to their father and met his solid pinwheels pupils with two of her own, resembling jagged, three pronged shuriken. They were as red as the handprint now colouring her cheek.

“Well.” Nishino said, pausing with his hand raised for another slap. “Why didn’t you say you killed him for the next stage of your Sharingan? I could understand that.”

“Because I didn’t!” Tessei yelled, getting her feet. “I killed Yari because he was a rabid dog that needed to be put down!” Her new eyes overflowed with red tears. “I killed him because it was my duty, because he was broken and he didn’t realise it-”

“Yari was a good shinobi!”

“He was a monster!” Tessei screamed, blood tears trailing down her face.

Kamo, crouching away with Toko behind the training posts, praying they would not be noticed, had never seen their sister so hysterical. Not when she activated her Sharingan before and not when she first heard her triplet Kita had died. Everyone suspected Yari had something to do with it, but he still didn’t have his Sharingan. Surely you couldn’t kill a sibling and not awaken your eyes from the guilt of it?

“I didn’t do it to please you or the clan! I did it to keep the rest of my family safe!” Tessei yelled further. “I didn’t want to kill my brother but I had to. He would have killed us all.”

“You exaggerate.” Declared Nishino, looking away towards where the rest of his children hide. “Still, now I can turn my attention to the last three without their eyes-”

“Leave them alone!” Tessei disappeared from sight, and re-appeared next to their father, a kunai striking towards his heart-

Except Nishino had disappeared himself and re-appeared behind her, able to easily grab and twist Tessei’s wrist, till she screamed in pain.
“But first, let me show you how to really use Kamui—”

“*It’s the Untouchable!*” Came the scream across the thicket Kamo’s team had been trying to sneak across unseen.

“Seriously?” Inoko muttered as the sound carried of their pursuers being messily murdered. “How am I supposed to be promoted with your sister taking all our kills?”

“Speak for yourself,” whispered back Shikari, “There was no way we’d get back without one of us being caught. My family don’t have the funds for another ransom.” He muttered to himself, tugging on his earringless ears.

Kamo bit his lip, hard enough to draw blood to keep himself from snapping at his spoilt companions. Their remaining older brother had gone missing a week before and he knew in his heart Aso was dead, his life and eyes lost to bloodline hunters. Tessei had gone to retrieve his remains, without permission from the Hokage.

These non-bloodlimit clans. They understood nothing. Ransom? Kamo relaxed his grip on the blade he had been readying himself to stab into his eyes and let his eyes bleed back to red, watching his sister’s figure disappear and reappear around them, dealing out death as fast as their father ever had. He had been so worried about her, the amount of eye drops and painkillers he had been sending her had got out of control-

“Where are we going to put them all?” demanded Toko, as they watched the Uzushio refugees queue up to register their names and hope other family had arrived before and done the same. “We can’t keep them in the cells forever. We have criminals to lock up.”

Kamo didn’t comment. Though they were loud and irritating, some of the Uzushio had seen him studying old healing texts while on watch duty and had given him their own tips for ailments. He still didn’t help any of them, not even when he saw an old mud covered woman stumble. She had smelly fishes in her weaved basket and his stomach turned.

“Here.” Out of nowhere a dark haired woman, reached out and helped the stumbling old woman to her feet. “I’ve got you, you’re almost there.” She wore typical Konoha style clothing, not the looser garments all the refugee’s insisted on clinging to.

“Civilians aren’t supposed to be in this part of the village—” Kamo frowned, stepping forward to separate they two.

“And police are supposed to aid those that need it. Yet here we are.” The girl retorted, putting an arm over the elder’s shoulders and talking most of her weight. “Back off Uchiha. I’m not afraid of your eyes.”

Kamo smiled despite himself and picked up the Konoha civilian’s abandoned sewing kit, following silently as she guided the old lady to the temporary shelter. He offered her back the kit with a polite bow, to which she gave a confused look.

“Might I have the name of such a noble helper of the elderly?” He asked boldly.

“Why, so you can look up my records and get me arrested for something?” she demanded, clutching her kit defensively. “It’s not against the law to help people!”
“It’s not.” Kamo agreed. “And I’m not police. I’m a medical examiner—”

“That’s not much better,” The woman told him softly. “Still gives you access to my records—” She smiled at his disappointed look. “But my name is Akena Taichi. If you must know.”

*

“You were always a disappointment,” his father rasped, as Kamo dug in his gaping gut wound with green chakra. “Who ever heard of a medical Uchiha.” he spat, looking down at his son trying to put his intestines back into his body.

Kamo hissed as his exhaustion warred with his anger. “I’m saving your life and you choose to insult me?”

“Maybe if you let me die you’ll finally get your Mangekyou Shar—”

“Isn’t two children with it enough? You only have six of us left alive!” Kamo snapped, losing his concentration. A tiny bit of flesh got caught in the closing skin and Kamo had to go back and undo the healing, least his father’s guts leak and kill him slowly.

“You are the great-grandson of Baru, who killed his own clan head and took the title for himself…” Began Nishino in a rambling tone.

“By marrying Rai’s daughter and she killed him and took his eyes the day she bore a living child- I know my twisted family history father.” Kamo hissed, trying to convince his tired fingers to keep moving.

“And yet you can’t make yourself kill a single brother, not even the one that had no Sharingan at all.”

“I love all my brothers and sisters, they did more to raise me than you ever did. They are worth more to me alive than dead. I’d rather die than sacrifice any of them for my own greedy ends like you have.” Kamo snapped, finishing his healing with a rough rough of disinfected across his father’s new scar. Only the Senju girl could heal without scarring and he would never get permission to learn her techniques.

“Everything I’ve ever done is for you and this family.”

“Everything you’ve ever done is for your twisted ego. You drove Yari to madness, he killed Kita to try getting his Sharingan—”

“And his triplet gained his eyes just by hearing the tale - weak boy.”

Taka activated his Mangekyo Sharingan out of guilt and pity for Tessei, having to fix your mistakes and take out Yari before he killed us all, Kamo didn’t say. Out of pity for Yari who could have been better with a different family, a different life. Out of pity for himself, being in this family where we pride love because of the rewards losing it will grant us.

“Well,” Nishino forced himself to his feet, eyes coming back to bright redness. “I suppose this is as fitting place as any to make my last stand.”

“Father, I’ve barely managed to stop the bleeding, get back down into the bed!”

“I’ve no interest in dying of internal bleeding, I’ve causes it enough times to know when it’s unhealable.” Nishino’s hand vanished for a moment and a huge gumbaki appeared. “I’m going to
die doing what I do best- putting the fear of Uchiha into our enemies-

“Father you can’t- is that Lord Madara’s gunbai?” Kamo’s objections stopped abruptly as he took in the image of his father letting loose his bun of hair and letting his still mostly dark hair fall down his shoulders in spikey waves. His father had hair like his daughters, Kamo thought distantly. Hair like Madara and his assumed missing weapon.

“I can’t wait to see the Senju’s faces when Madara appears out of nowhere to save their miserable army,” Nishino grinned, blood spilling down his checks as his eyes spin. “But first I suppose I had better show you one last thing-.”

*

“I’ll ask again. Are you sure you want to do this?”

The two triplets looked at Kamo tiredly. “What else can we do? Better to say we tried, than did nothing as we both went blind.” Take said with resignation.

“You should be doing this with Kita, not me,” Tessei spat out angrily. “This isn’t right-”

“You are my triplet too, Tessei,” Take said softly, catching Tessei’s hand. “I’m sorry we always made you feel so left out. But you killed Yari and avenged Kita. I would be honoured if you bore my eyes.”

“Fine.” Tessei looked away embarried. “Alright little Duck. Let’s see you pay us back for all the medic jutsu we stole for you.”

“Swapping four Mangekyou Sharingan by myself with no experience or backup. No pressure.” Kamo muttered as his siblings lay down in the deserted morgue.

*

“Tell me again why some random refugee is coming with us on our important mission?” Hashirama’s brat son demanded again.

“Because this refugee knows the only route through the mountains that will get us to the Raiding Lord before his hord comes down from the plateau and makes slaves of us all...” the white haired women said shortly, easily keeping up on the ground as the four man team tree-hoped through the newly grown forest.

“I thought he was calling himself the Lightning Lord now. Now there’s a stupid name-” Haruka Hyuuga muttered to himself as he jumped ahead.

“Bold words from the Konoha nin living in the Land of Fire. Why didn’t you call yourselves the Village of Smoke?” Eboshi Hatake called up merrily.

“Because Tobirama was a tightfisted bastard who wouldn’t let us import coal any more..” muttered Kamo.

“What was that?” demanded Sasuke Sarutobi from the centre of the group.

“I said, “Because Hashirama grew all the trees for us to hide in, Sir!”” Kamo said pleasantly. Sarutobi gave him a suspiscious look before returning his attention to the woman on the ground.

“Hatake, you’ll have to go around here and meet us further inland, the ground is going to get swampy soo-”
“I’m fine!” And with that the newcomer launched herself upward, jumping from one tree trunk to another until she was on a branch level with the rest of them. “This chakra walking looks ridiculous, but it’s easy enough to pick up.” She said with a toothy smile. Even across from them it was intimidating how tall she was. Young Haruka only came up to her shoulders.

Kamo and the Senju looked at each other, not wanting to give away how long it usually took new recruits to master chakra tree climbing. A grown women that had only learnt how to focus her chakra a few month back should not be this good at it already.

“Come on boys,” Eboshi Hatake called as she jumped ahead. “Temujin’s not going to murder himself!”

* 

“This is the part where you beg me to stay.” Akena said softly, pausing at the doorway, bag in her hand.

Kamo didn’t look up, focusing on the thin wire he was carefully spooling in his hands. If he looked up at her saddened face he might voice his emotions, might beg her not to go.

Akena sighed, “Well, if you change your mind. You know where to find me.” And the love of his life walked away.

“You’re a fool,” Elif declared, having come in the back with an arm full of stinking skins. “That woman loves you. Go after her.”

“Not yet.” Kamo said softly. “I have to make something of myself first. Earn the right to her love.”

“That’s not how it works.” the Suna born woman sighed and returned to her work shed outside. “You’ll regret letting her go. Heed my words.”

* 

“Where is she?” Nori Uchiha screamed opening Kamo’s door with a bang. “Where is Honoka? I know your son has been leading her on, Kanaya. I won’t put up with it any longer.”

Kamo, still in the grip of his beloved whiskey laughed as Nori grabbed him by the collar and lifted him off the ground. “My son has never led anyone anywhere. He always does as he wants and damn the consequences.”

“Father!” Izanami yelled, following him in with a protective hand on her gently curving stomach. “You can’t threaten Kamo! Put him down before one of his siblings find out!”

“Too late.” Tessei announced, appearing out of mid air, as if stepping from an invisible door. “What’s the matter Nori, finally remember you’ve got another daughter, now that your favorite is knocked up?” Lightly Tessei ran a finger across the kitchen knife in her hand, “Put down my brother and we’ll find Honoka and send her home.”

Kamo laughed bitterly. “No you won’t.” He tossed his wife’s heirloom pinbox at his sister, the gold coin in it rattling. “They’ve been gone for a week, we just didn’t notice until now. I got the news of their marriage this morning.”

“No.” Tessei stared down at the tin box, bird symbol embroidered on it’s lid. “No, they’re both Uchiha, the marriage law can’t apply to them.”
“Rai was adopted into his mother’s clan a year ago.” Kamo ignored the hand still holding his collar to reach out and pick up his whiskey bottle. “Since he never got his Sharingan, never had his adult ceremony in the shrine, his name was never added. He hasn’t been a Uchiha in years…”

“Why didn’t you say anything Kamo?” Demanded Tessei. “He’s your son, you should have-”

“Oh NOW he’s my son? NOW I should give him some attention!” Kamo yanked himself out of Nori’s grip and swallowed the last mouthful of alcohol, before flinging the bottle at his sister. The bottle vanished away before to could hit Tessei’s bemused face. “You’ve spent his entire life telling me he’s not worth my attention, that I should forget him and have other children. But now that he’s run off with Nori’s last chance to marry into the head family, now I should have done more with him?” He laughed hard and long, until his cackles turned to harsh sobs.

Izanami and Tessei watched him with concern, Nori with disgust.

“I did what you told me, when you told me not to marry Akena. To take Rai from her and make a shinobi of him. And what good did that do anyone? He’s gone back to her and he took Honoka with. We’re never getting them back.” Kamo sobbed into his knees.

*Kamo took the job at the corner, despite the drop in pay and status. Toko tried to talk him out of it, but they were distant with each other since Tessei’s death. The war was looming and Kamo had no intention of staying in the medical field and risk getting sent to the frontlines. He had done his part in the last two wars, he wouldn’t be sent out to a third. He had once been one of twelve siblings and now he was one of three.

The job had the advantage that he could have lunch every day in the courtyard that was used by the children of the nearby apartment building. There was always a game of some kind going on and it raised Kamo’s spirits to see the small civilian children turn their hand to playing games that had nothing to do with shinobi training.

In the midst of the rotating crowd, Rai’s daughter was easy to pickout, always dressed in the best kept clothes. Akena was sometimes visible from her balcony overlooking the courtyard, bent over an endless pile of embroidery, but she clearly still spared time to make sure her granddaughter was well kept.

She had been looking a little skinny of late, Kamo had to admit. Everyone had been on war rations for a year now and few had weight to spare, but the girl was looking too small for four.

He started unwrapping his stack of flatbread noisily, aware that the older kids were already watching him cautiously. He always made himself eat the first stack, if only so he could answer Taka’s oldest boy honestly, when he asked his old uncle if he had eaten enough that day.

Kamo only had to reach out with the next slice for the watching children to crowd around him, hands outstretched eagerly for food. Kamo didn’t let his eyes linger on his granddaughter as she stretched her hand into the crowd of open palms, or smile at her when she withdrew with a grin, biting down on her gained treat.

Rai had died before Kamo could swallow his pride and beg to be introduced to his only grandchild. Kamo would do what he had to, to see this child thrive.

*
“- no.” Akena tried to slam her door in his face, but Kamo easily stopped her weak push. “Please no. You can’t take her from me!”

Kamo walked into the tiny apartment without paying her any attention, noticing that while it was bare, it was immaculately clean and tidy. Lines of embroidery and mending hung everywhere, Akena’s flawless stitches on them all. She had to have been working every hour of daylight.

In one corner of the room, playing with a rag doll in a dress of the same pretty cherry blossom fabric as her own, was Kamo’s small granddaughter. She smiled politely as Kamo approached her, not recognising him.

“She’s fine. I’m taking care of her. You have no right!” Akena ran after him, anger giving her energy she did not have to spare. Her weak fists beat futilely against Kamo’s shoulder. His suspicion that she had been starving herself to keep her granddaughter fed was confirmed by the new wrinkles all over her face and limbs.

Kamo had lived this moment before, forcing his way into his lover’s home and taking her child from her. It haunted him, more than the deaths of any of his siblings or family. He had done what he felt he had to and now he was poised to do so again-

“Please.” Akena threw herself onto his back and clung to his jacket. “Please don’t take her. If you ever loved me-” She was older than he had ever imagined she could get. They both were. No one had ever expected Kamo to be one of the last living children of Nishino of the Endless Barrage.

Gently, Kamo reached out and cupped Akena’s wrinkled cheek. “It’s alright, I’m here for both of you.” He turned back to their granddaughter and knelt down to meet her confused face.

“Hello, I’m your grandfather. It’s nice to meet you.”

Dark eyes met his. She had Rai’s smile. Kamo’s heart ached. He could fix this, he could.

* 

His granddaughter’s Sharingan stared out of Eboshi Hatake’s grandson’s eye socket, brilliant and red. It mocked Kamo and his overwhelming grief. With shaking hands he palmed his scalpel and waited for his moment to strike. He had hunted down bloodline hunters for days to take back Take’s eyes, he could take down the visibly drained boy the moment his teacher’s back was turned.

“I’m telling you, we could not go back for his body. Obito was buried deep under the forest ground, there was no way we could have gotten down there again!” Argued the Yellow Flash in the background of Kamo’s focus. “You know as well as I that forest was Temple territory. No one is allowed in there regardless of the war. If the priests find out we violated their sacred lands they could begin the war anew.” The man’s voice softened, as if he did truly care about Obito’s remains. “I’m so sorry, but I know Obito wouldn’t want us to risk the peace we won with his sacrifice. We simply can’t go back for him. Not ever.” He lowered his head, eyes closed in regret. Next to him his surviving students did the same. Obito’s teammates had the audacity to look stricken.

It was the perfect moment to strike, take back the only part of Obito left and grant it a decent funeral pyre-

Toko grabbed his hand and squeezed it, his face sympathetic, but his grip firm. “You can’t Kamo. He’s going to be the next Hokage- we can’t ariante him by killing his favorite student.”

“MY GRANDCHILD IS DEAD!” Kamo screamed at his sole remaining brother. “My son, his mother, all of our siblings gone. All I had left was her and she’d gone but for her eye. And you tell
me I can’t take back what is ours by every law of this village?”

“Now Elder-”

“You must remain calm-”

“You don’t understand-”

“You can have it!” the Hakate boy’s voice cut over all the objections, uncovering the left side of his face once more. “It was a gift from Obito, so he could see the future through my eyes.” He swallowed, the movement pulling on the fresh stitches holding his cheek and eyelid together. “But if you really want to, you can take if from me.”

“No!” Obito’s best friend objected, putting herself between Kamo and her teammate. “Grandfa-Honoured Elder,” Rin corrected herself. “It was Obito’s idea to give Kakashi his eye. I wouldn’t have done the transplant if it wasn’t Obito’s dying wish. He wanted to keep us safe-”

Kamo tuned out her ramblings, shaking off Toko’s hand and getting up. He walked away from the arguing, not caring what happened next. His grandchild was gone. Everything of Rai, of Akena was gone forever. What did he care what happened next.

*

Fire. But worse than fire. Uchiha were born with fire in their blood and it was the first tool they mastered. This was not pure, good fire. It wasn’t even the intense focused flames of Amaterasu that the clan head’s line wielded as their mangekyou Sharingan gift.

It was uncontained Biju- chakra, infused flames and it burnt everything.

Kamo thought he had nothing left to lose. He was wrong.

He walked through the ruins of the house he had lived in for more than fifty years, the home his siblings had lived and birthed and died in. He walked through the ashes and eventually found his brother Toko, his last sibling, burnt away to nothing but bones and smoldering ashes, clutched futilely around the matching remains of his wife Elif.

At least now Kamo didn’t have to tell them their children and grandchildren were gone too.

Calmly, Kamo knelt down into the filth and dug out a broken piece of wood, one end long and pointy. It would be best to die now, give the clan the ease of including him with the mass rites they would carry out that night-

“Grandfather! Grandfather Kamo?”

There was no one alive who should call him grandfather- Taka’s two went with the first landing of the fox, Aino’s son breathed his last in Kamo’s arms an hour ago-

“Lord Kanaya? Ranma sent me to get you. Lady Mikoto is catatonic and won’t respond to anything. She wants you to come give her something-”

It was Sakuya’s voice. Obito’s only girl cousin, who always took him to the memorial stone when he asked her, who always brought an extra stick of dango to leave for Obito’s ghost. Kamo didn’t respond to the girl. He wanted her to go so he could die in peace with his brother-
“-Kamooo? She can’t feed her baby and Itachi is freaking out and won’t let anyone else touch his brother-”

Reluctantly Kamo dropped the stick and pulled himself to his feet wearily. He’d make sure the few Uchiha that survived were cared for and then he’d quietly go. Just do what little he could to heal them then join his family in the pure lands-

*

Kamo’s knees lost all feeling and he sank down on Izanami’s clean floor at the site of the body on the futon. It was his grandchild, years older and covered in wounds and sores. But alive, gloriously alive.

His eyes welled up, tears falling down his wrinkled cheeks. His plans to stop his heart once his affairs were in order were abandoned. He had to live, live on and make sure Obito got everything she needed to heal.

Kamo swore an oath, to his son and daughter-in-law, to his dead lover and all eleven dead siblings, that he would whatever it took to make Obito’s second chance at life the best he could arrange.

He wiped away his tears and crawled on his knees to Obito’s bedside, putting out a gentle hand to her scared chin. Next to her a tin wash basin, reflecting his face. “I think this is all the time we have left, Obito.” he said softly, looking into the reflection of his Sharingan.

Obito blinked and she was no longer Kanaya Uchiha, seeing everything from his eyes, but her eighteen year old self, standing next to her similarly aged grandfather on a high hilltop, the same view he had seen with from the back of his mother when they first entered Konoha.

She turned to look at Kamo and his gaze clearer and more coherent than it had been in months.

“But-” she argued, “There’s so much more I have to ask you-”

“You’ll have to work it out for yourself.” Kamo, in a body only a few years older than Obito’s, smiled widely. “You’re very good at that, as I recall.” He was broad shouldered and taller than Obito was used to, but his smile was the same.

“No.” Obito reached out, stepping towards him on two steady legs, “I’m not ready. Please don’t go. Don’t leave me all alone. I can’t survive with no one on my side.”

“My dear,” Kamo wrapped his arms around her and Obito was four and her belly full for the first time in days, six with fleshly cut hair and boy’s clothing, ten and newly graduated, fifteen and returned from the dead, eighteen and hugging her grandfather good-bye.

Kamo resting his forehead on Obito’s and their four eyes spun together in perfect unison. “There is nowhere on this earth you can go and be alone. As long as the moon follows the sun, you will always have someone on your side.” He smiled, the smile Obito had inherited. “Quickly now, don’t you want to see the rest of them?”

“The rest?”

*

When Obito’s mind finally came back to the present, Kamo was unconscious. His soul had long departed and his withered old body had yet to realise it, clinging to life out of stubborn habit alone. Beyond the sealed bedroom, she could sense the chakra of multiple people, all family, all Uchiha and
anxious and waiting.

Obito took a deep, shuddering breath and buried down the overwhelming swamping of memories and emotions that were not her own. Her head ached as she tried to sort the present from the past. She had a duty. She needed to do one last custom before she could break down.

Obito reached over her grandfather’s slackened body and took up the kunai being used as a bookmark in the novel she had read to him just that morning. With a steady hand she gripped his frail shoulder and slit his throat deeply. The sleeve of her kimono caught most of the blood.

Then Obito cupped his cheek and neatly sliced into each eye socket of Kanaya Uchiha, son of Nishino and Chihiro, descendant of Baru the Kinslayer, brother to many and friend to even more. Only once Obito was sure she had thoroughly destroyed the eyes, the blood and gore carefully contained in his eye sockets, and his throat had ceased it’s bleeding, did she allow herself to slump over his chest and sob.

Chapter End Notes

Exit Kamo stage left!

I have so many other scenes I wanted to put in as memories of Konoha's founding but this chapter is long enough already. I might put them in a side story if enough people ask.

**Nishino and Chihiro’s 12 living children, numbers are their death order**

Aso - oldest, battle axe user. Died in 2nd war to bloodline hunters 7
Tsurugi - Died of infection, body stolen by bloodline hunters 3
Aino - activated his Mangekyou by killing her spy lover. Went blind and purposely got killed on a mission. 10
Yari - psychopath. Killed summons for fun. Never activated his Sharingan because you have to love to do so. Killed Kita out of anger that all the triplets activated theirs. Tessei purposefully let him get stuck in a mudslide, activating her Mangekyou Sharingan as he died. 5
Toko - kidnapped and married a Suna leather worker, on her instructions. No Sharingan, average talent. Longest surviving sibling after Kamo. Father to Takao, Gai’s genin sensei. All three died in the Kyuubi attack. 11
Tessei-Kita-Take. The triplets. Kita and Take were identical and close, Tessei left to her own devices and spent most of her time with Kanaya as a result. Kita was killed by Yari. Tessei organised Yari’s death via mudslide and watched him dying, unexpectedly activating her Mangekyou Sharingan as a result. Take gained his Mangekyou Sharingan when hearing the story, out of guilt and sorrow at his triplets sacrifice.
Kanaya helped them swap eyeballs to prevent blindness. Both died under mysterious circumstances during the third war, probably to bloodline hunters. 8 4 9
Iwaki - died to bloodline hunters 1
Kanaya - Kamo 12
Gyosha - died young before even joining the academy 2
Ro - Died in a bloodline raid during the second war 6
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Declarations are made, concussions are reached. Two crazy kids exchange kisses and weapons. Everyone plots for their own ends and Obito is underestimated by everyone.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Kakashi found himself lingering in the quiet back street the disguised ANBU entrance opened to. His team had been dismissed and he had seen them all off but he was reluctant to rejoin Konoha proper. There was a lot on his mind and he was not comfortable with the idea of dealing with other people so soon. Tenzo hadn’t been in the barracks, but Kakashi had been told it wasn’t an issue and he would be briefed after his mandatory two days off.

It was late and Obito would be tucked away in the Uchiha compound, out of his reach. Just as Kakashi convinced himself that a quick visit to Orphanage number Six, and the memorial stone couldn’t hurt anyone, he noticed Shizune doing her own lingering a little further down the street.

“Trouble?” he asked softly, taking in the bag Shizune still carried with her and the travel stained clothing she wore. Evidently she had not been allowed to use the ANBU showers and facilities.

“Just… deciding where to go.” Shizune said softly, chewing on a thumb nail. “The village is very different. I don’t remember it being so bright at night. It’s like any other city now. I didn’t think it would change so much.”

“We had to rebuild and the civilians took the chance to modernise while they were about it. We still have lighting restrictions but not in the centre of the village. Come on,” Kakashi reluctantly offered, “I’ll show you where the hostels are now and you can apply to the tower in the morning for formal lodging.”

“It’s fine.” Shizune said, even as she followed him down the street. “I’m used to finding a place to stay in unfamiliar towns. I can find my own way…” she glanced at a brightly lit bar and looked away, frowning to herself.

Kakashi didn’t have the words or energy to express concern for the turmoil Shizune was still undergoing. The parting between her and her teacher had been cold and brutal. The pig had been the only thing that expressed emotions, squealing pitifully as Shizune walked away from it, held back in Tsunade’s arms.

Obito would know what to do, the thought cheered him. Tomorrow Kakashi would find her and undoubtedly she would eagerly involve herself in the job of rehoming and settling Shizune. Maybe Shizune could do something about the leg pain Obito always got in the afternoons, no matter how Kakashi tried to massage or medicate it away.

“-HATAKE!” a cheery voice called, from behind. Kakashi twisted around to see a civilian waving from the doorway of the bar they had passed. “-fancy seeing you here. And with company.” The woman called and smiled at Shizune, stumbling slightly under the taxing effort of walking towards...
them. “Can I interest either of you in a drink? This place is… adequate.”

Sumiya, Kakashi’s memory supplied helpfully, as he edged away and ignored Shizune’s raised eyebrows. Sakuya Uchiha’s girlfriend. Someone who knew about Obito and him…

“Nice to see you, but we’ve got to go~”


“Nice to meet you Just Shizune, I’m Sumiya,” Sumiya burped daintily into her hand, “Excuse me. I’m not at my best. Drinking to forget is really hard.” she giggled.

“I studied with an expert. I’ll show you how it’s done. Coming Kakashi?” Shizune looked at him hopefully, tiredness still in her eyes.

Kakashi looked at her, then Sumiya and shook his head with a surprising amount of reluctance. Both women looked like they needed supervision but he didn’t have the energy to deal with a bar filled with people.

Shizune frowned at him then turned to the blonde. “So what are we drinking to forget?”

Sumiya smiled brightly."My Uchiha girlfriend of eighteen months and twenty-three days dumped me without warning the moment her clan found out about me. You?”

“I just abandoned the woman that raised me for twenty years and she’ll probably end up dead in a ditch before the year is up.” Shizune summed up just as lightly. Pain hung heavy in the air between them.

Both women stopped and turned to look back at Kakashi expectedly. Kakashi reflexly pulled out his book and buried his face in it. Of all the things he had to drink about none were worth the pain of speaking them out aloud.

“Your father chose death to try and spare you his shame. I chose death to keep my son from war as long as I can. Neji is a genius too, they will have him following Itachi Uchiha’s example as soon as the opportunity arises. This is the only way I can protect him, by hoping my sacrifice will put off the war long enough for him to grow up.”

Hizashi’s resigned face and laid out corpse, the memory of Tsunade elbow deep in his chest, eyes closed so she didn’t have to see the blood, made Kakashi reach for the numbness he always carried within himself, wrap it safely around himself until he felt nothing at all.

“Sounds like you two have a lot to talk about. Good-night Shizune, Sumiya-san” Kakashi said blandly and walked away, ignoring the looks the women exchanged.

He turned a corner and took to the roofs, lightly jumping from one building to another, landing with automatic silence. No one would complain of his footsteps disturbing their nights. Few would even notice him unless he wanted them too. Kakashi was getting to the point where it was harder not to move invisibly through the night, a shadow among shadows.

* 

Genma was on guard duty at the orphanage that night through, and he always noticed Kakashi trying to lurk. But his old senpai just gave him a subtle smile and waved him over to his covert perch on a tree branch, level with the orphanage’s third level. Since Kakashi started cutting down his stalking
sessions to weekly visits, the old Hokage bodyguards had chased him off less often.

“He’s learning to write again, this time with the left hand.” Genma started, “It’s going about as well as it did with the right. But he’s throwing less tantrums. He’s been a bit too quiet lately, but that might just be growing pains.” He summed up optimistically. “He’s in the third bed on the right, with the bright green sheets, if you want to check.” He moved aside without waiting for Kakashi to respond and there was no choice but for Kakashi to move over into his place. Carefully angled on another branch was a small mirror, that corresponded with another above it, aimed at Naruto’s dormitory window and another mirror allowing him to see into the room.

The tiny reflection of a small blond boy curled up in bed made part of Kakashi’s stomach unclench. It made his chest hurt, to see the boy one of many in a tightly packed room of orphans, but he would take one pain over the other.

Naruto was safe. One worry put to rest.

Kakashi took in a breath and reluctantly stepped away, allowing Genma to retake his watching spot. His shoulders relaxed fractionally.

“You missed a great party,” Genma took up his conversation, going through a set of hand signs to verify nothing had changed in the last ten minutes. “For a day time celebration with such a mix of people, everyone went away happy. Anko and Gai finally met. It was just as good as I always hoped. Obito has a gift for bringing people together, even if it’s mostly by accident.”

“She does.” Kakashi agreed softly and another part of his stomach unclenched. Genma would tell him if anything happened to Obito.

“Of course then her grandfather went and died on her that night, but I’m told it was a long time coming. I went to watch the funeral smoke, from outside the compound gates, of course. And a lot of others were there too. The way they talked about Kamo when he was young- he fed a bunch of families through the war, healed without pay as he could- Obito must have got that goodness from him.” Genma reached out a hand to cut off his questions, without taking his eyes off his scan of the orphanage roof. “She’s fine Hatake. Mourning period ends tomorrow, and one of those desk-nin actually went right up to the Uchiha gate guards and demanded to see Obito in person, make sure she was coming into work soon. Bold thing wouldn’t move until her cousin came out and vouched Obito was alright…” Genma finished his scan and glanced back at Kakashi, his half smile falling away as he looked at Kakashi’s face.

One day Kakashi would work out how so many people could read his masked, blank face so well. But not today. “Which cousin,” he asked thinking back to Sumiya’s pained eyes and shaky smile.

“The girl one with a flower name. The one that caught that slave-seller in the East quarters and forced him to reveal who he sold to?” Genma looked back to the mirrors, “Sakura?”

“Sakuya Uchiha’s girlfriend is getting drunk in a bar with Shizune because she dumped her on her clan’s orders.” Kakashi said softly. Genma was good at understanding people and motives, maybe there was a different way to look at the situation.

“Right,” Genma said steadily and his tone made Kakashi switch back to active ANBU stance, ready to react to his superior’s orders. “That’s not good. There was a prison break a couple of weeks ago and Sakuya’s the new prison warden. Utatane was the one to appoint her and then the old woman suddenly went to the Daimyo’s court and hasn’t been back since. Everyone thinks it was to reassure him the Kumo-Suna hostilities won’t affect us…” Even deep in his considerations, Genma continued to scan the area for threats.
Kakashi fought to hold on to his waiting stance. He needed to go do something-

“No,” Genma said, more to himself than Kakashi, “The Uchiha know they’re in a tight spot, even with the prison under their control. Surveillance continues and we know they know they’re being watched. Plus it was a big crowd at Kamo’s funeral, even if they wouldn’t let us in to pay our respects. They won’t risk public opinion getting even worse by manipulating Obito while she’s in mourning.” Genma took a deep breath, and reached back to pat Kakashi’s arm. “She’s safe in her grief. And she’s an adult now. What I said still stands. Obito should be at work tomorrow and you can drag her off for cuddling during her lunch-break, Iwashi would be happy to arrange a distraction for-”

“No,” Kakashi moved away from Genma’s touch and prepared to leap away. “Obito’s still mad at him.” He left before he gave into the awkward urge to thank Genma, tell him how much his team’s efforts to keep Naruto and Obito safe meant to him.

He wanted very much to visit the memorial, since it was late enough to guarantee no other visitors. But he needed food and sleep and Obito fretted when she dreamed of him spending hours by the carved names. Kakashi would see her tomorrow.

He saw the memorial just as he came into view of his apartment. He saw it with eyes that were not in his own. Which meant Obito was at the memorial, hours after curfew, in the dark.

Kakashi turned and used Shunshin to get him across the village fast.

*

Civilians considered white the mourning colour. Shinobi lived lives full of death and mourning, white funeral clothing would wear out far too quickly. So Kakashi found Obito dressed from head to toe in black, an outfit that had doubtlessly been passed along in her family and seen more funerals than anyone living had.

Grief did not suit Obito. Listless eyes and neutral mouth, sallow skin and a head bent low with despair. Kakashi would far rather see her angry, animatedly sobbing with indignation or obnoxiously argumentative than as she looked now, all of her energy sapped away.

“How did you get out here?” he demanded, falling to his knees next to her crutch. “Did they take your leg again?” he gestured to the loose pants leg, not even pinned closed to protect her stump. Kakashi would storm the compound gates himself if they were pulling that shit again-

“No,” Obito said with a shrug. “I didn’t feel like putting it on. It’s easier to just use the crutches-”

That was contradictory to everything Obito had said and done these past two years. Obito always preferred to have her leg on and giving the appearance of normality, even when she would have been better off with walking aids.

Kakashi paused with his arms outstretched, not sure how to react. He wanted to gather Obito into his arms and hold her tightly, until the frightening fragility in her face was gone. But she made no indication that his touch was welcome and he simply couldn’t make himself close the small distance between them. Obito always took the lead when it came to their physical affection.

She usually took the lead when it came to their conversations too, so Kakashi was stuck, unable to know what to do or say as they remained silent, sitting in the dark besides the memorial stone.

It loomed over them, foreboding and grim. The slim moon made it impossible to read any of the names without aid but Kakashi had long ago memorised the placement of the names that mattered to
him. If he tilted his head slightly, he would just be able to see the spot Obito’s name had been. Some other Uchiha name was in its place now, having been changed mere days after Obito return from the dead.

He glanced sideways at Obito, still silent and pale, staring unseeingly ahead of her. Her hair had been neatly tied up in a painfully tight looking bun, dozens of small pins stuck into it. Without expression on her face, without her hair falling free and in the baggy, generic mourning clothing, Obito could have been any other Uchiha.

Kakashi spent hours on this very spot, three years ago, convinced he was the sole survivor of his team. He would have given up both his eyes to have any of them back and now, with Obito sitting right next to him in terrible pain, he couldn’t do a thing to comfort her.

“I-” he started to say, just to break the silence. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t here.”

Obito didn’t acknowledge that she had heard him speak at all.

“Is-” he thought frantically, “Is there someone I can get? To talk to you?” He would break down walls and drag back whoever Obito named, anyone to get a reaction from her.

Obito sighed slowly.

Gai, Kakashi thought desperately. Gai would know what to do. He should be in the village, he tried to be on hand when Kakashi returned from his serious missions-

“It’s fine.” Obito said finally. “Everyone else is dead.”

Kakashi had thought that very thought so often. He had believed it with his whole heart, that he had no one else in the world and there was nothing else to concern himself with. Except-

“That’s not true.” he said roughly, calling on all the words others had said to him while he mourned. “There are so many people that care about you Obito. I don’t even know all their names - Genma and Raido, Owl and your veterans group, Inoko and Lady Kukabu. Every one of them would rush here if I told them you needed help, Your doctor would-” He shut his mouth, abruptly remembering that Obito’s personal medic was Mariko Hyuuga and Kakashi had helped murder her husband just a week ago.

“I went into the Hyuuga house and dragged Neji away from Lord Hyuuga,” Obito said distantly, “I stood face to face with the elders and yelled at them about how Mariko needed her son to recover-” her lips jerked and she shrugged her shoulders. “I was stupid.”

“You’re not stupid.” Kakashi snapped automatically, not understanding what Obito was saying.

“I am stupid.” Obito said simply. “I’m the stupidest person alive. I actually thought I was doing good, that I was making a difference. Now I see how foolish I was. It’s impossible to do any good in this world, it never lasts, the bad always comes back again.” She was still not looking at anything. “I saw my grandfather’s life, from start to finish and my father’s life through his eyes too. It was a long painful life with too few good patches. He lived and died a pointless life-”

“That’s not true!” Kakashi corrected her sharply, unable to bear her tone. “Kanaya Uchiha was a good man. Many people mourn his death, they all watched the funeral smoke from outside the compound.” He rambled on, trying to think of something to say to stir her. “He fed orphans during the war, he gave the dead back to their families, when there was no one else to care about identifying bodies- He helped you.” Kakashi emphasised. “You told me, he took you in and raised you, when he didn’t need to, when the rules of your clan said he shouldn’t bother.
“Kanaya Uchiha might have seen his life as pointless, but the people he helped disagree. I disagree. I think—” he took a small breath, “I think the way he lived and the way he carried on, despite everything, makes him a hero.”

Obito looked at him with blank eyes, no expression on her face. Kakashi held his breath, out of anything else to say.

Then his left eye started to blur as all of Obito’s eyes filled with tears and she finally moved forward to lean her crying face into his chest and sob. He brought up his arms around her shaking shoulders and sighed in relief. A crying Obito was normal, tears were something he was used to. Tears were good.

* 

“I can’t believe you let this happen.”

Hiruzen waved off the ANBU that appeared between him and the intruder of his office, and offered Danzo a seat without concern. “What are you complaining about today, Danzo?”

“Don’t act as if you don’t know!” Danzo stared down at the offered chair before gingerly sitting, hooking his cane to the back of it. “You let Kinoe go to the Senju, they’ll ruin him.”

“Oh?” Hiruzen pointedly closed the file on his desk and moved it away from his old teammate’s roving eye. “Do you think so?”

“I know so. They’re indebted to the Aburame now and the Aburame have a grudge against the council.”

“They have a grudge against you.” Corrected Hiruzen calmly. The insect hosts had not appreciated being used as a tool to trap the Uchiha into accepting their new compound placement. Their innocent request to move to the outskirts of the village in the wake of Konoha’s rebuilding had allowed Danzo to place the Uchiha in a single compound outside of the center as well, into position to be spied on by ANBU. And the Aburame had grasped the idea that what was done to one major clan could be done to another...

“Which they will now use to turn the Senju against us—” Danzo ignored his correction. “The Senju that now have a new clan heir. This changes their entire situation, having a living Mokuton user. One who they will never allow back into ANBU. All of Kinoe’s training wasted because of your slip up.”

“The boy is only thirteen. And very dutiful. Give Tenzo some time to adjust to his new circumstances and I’m sure he’ll see his loyalty lies in the whole village, not a single clan.”

“You’re not going to demand him back?” Danzo’s tone was indignant.

“I imagine that you are only here because you know such an act is impossible.” Hiruzen said calmly.

Danzo was silent for a moment, not denying or acknowledging the truth in Hiruzen’s words. Then he changed the subject, moving on to a fresh grievance.

“And where is Koharu? She overstepped her authority and put the prison under the control of the Uchiha then fled for the capital. She won’t respond to my letters.”

“Koharu tells me her plans as much as you ever do, old friend. I believe she had a pre-arranged meeting with the Daimyo’s wife, some woman’s matter.”
“She left alone?” Subtle adjusting of his shoulders suggested Danzo was thrown by that new piece of information. “Did she take anyone with her? A female Jounin perhaps, with burn scars over her eyes…”

“Koharu took her usual staff and guards, I did not pay them any special attention. Do you have anything to speak of about your own projects, or are you here to just complain about others?”

“… the civilians are up to something.”

“We have a population of over fifty thousand civilians, please be more specific.”

“The guildhall. They had an emergency trial, failed to convict Obito Uchiha and now have numerous meetings to discuss the death of the Raikage. They’re planning something.”

“The guildhall are the leaders of the civilians, Danzo. They have meetings all the time to keep the village running. Of course they discuss major events like a Kage’s death. They have to take into account such details when it comes to importing and money exchanges. And,” Hiruzen put an edge of steel into his voice. “I have asked you to leave Obito alone. Jiraiya is convinced you have it out for her.”

“She has it out for us! She and every Uchiha hates us for preventing them from being the leaders of the village. They’ll finish what the Kyuubi started if we allow them-”

“ENOUGH!” Hiruzen slammed down his hand on his desk, the other reaching under the desk for his emergency flask. “I’m sick to death of Obito Uchiha and all the plots she’s allegedly involved in.” He drank a mouthful and barely winced at the burn of the alcohol. “She can barely climb a staircase unaided, Obito’s no threat to anyone. Leave her alone. Leave the civilians alone and go back to your appointed duties of keeping track of what is happening outside of the village. Do you have any idea why Kiri is killing its own clans?”

*

Obito subsided her tears after only a short while, but she remained in Kakashi’s embrace. He had relocated them to a more defensible spot on a tree branch and was content to let her hold him as long as she needed.

Eventually, Obito pulled her face away from where her tears had wet his shirt, enough to speak clearly and cleared her throat. “It’s you,” she said softly. “I want you. I choose you. For when you asked me what I wanted, when you said you wanted to be together again. Of course I want that too.”

Kakashi felt a knot of tension in his mind relax. There were many other worries left in its place but it gave him a breath of relief, nonetheless.

“I love you,” Obito whispered into his side, “It’s stupid and foolish and I don’t know what to do about it, but I love you and I wanted you to know. I don’t want to waste more time or play games or act ashamed. Kamo lived his whole life as he was told and it lost him so many people. I don’t want that.”

Kakashi swallowed hard forced himself to respond. “You saying that means a lot. But I’m not what you think I am. There’s so much you don’t know…”

“You are Bakashi,” Obito declared, pulling away to look at him. “You’re proud and stubborn and insecure. You like eggplant barely cooked, lemon grass makes you sneeze and the sound of feet on tatami mats makes you sad. You like to blame yourself for everything because you prefer being in control than admitting sometimes life is just awful. I’ve known you since you were five, I’ve seen the
inside of your head and I have not run away in fear or disgust.”

“I know emotions are hard for you and I don't expect you to say anything in return. I just thought you deserved to know. That you are loved and there is nothing you can do about it. So there.”

Obito looked away, despite her defiant tone. Sometimes emotions were hard for her too.

Gently Kakashi put a hand to her chin and tilted her face back to meet his eyes. He hoped she could read the words he couldn’t say in his.

She must have, because Obito smiled and leaned up to kiss him. And for a moment everything was perfect.

*

Gently Jiraiya closed the book and set it on the bar table. He stared into space, ignoring his sulking companion. He had ignored her as the night went on, becoming more and more engrossed in the book Kakashi had lent him. He had thought it was just a cheap copy of his own work and started it insulted and trying to find clues to where it had come from. But “Come and Go-away”, while keeping to the same storyline as his own book, focused on side characters, gave different motivations to them and put more emphasis on their growth than the plot. He had read the last half utterly engrossed, forgetting it was his work it plagiarized.

“I don’t know if I should be impressed or insulted.” he said out aloud and tried to drink from his long empty cup.

“You talking about the part where the handmaiden and Lady run off together and leave the hero behind?” asked a voice behind him.

Jiraiya turned to see it was an old Nara asking, not looking away from his hand of cards. His companions, mostly civilians with a single Akimichi, glanced away from their own cards for a moment to nod an acknowledgement at Jiraiya before going back to their game.

Jiraiya didn’t know how to respond. He didn’t socialise with anyone his own age anymore, especially in his own village. He flirted with young woman and taunted young men, drove them away to see who would come to defend them and then tried to pick a fight with them. Very few were keen to challenge the Great Toad Sage and fewer still treated him with the friendly absentmindness the card players displayed.

“Shikari’s very proud of that book.” the Akimichi nudged the farmer next to him with a mischievous grin. “He helped with all the sex scenes.”

“I helped with the birth control facts.” corrected the Nara with a hauty sniff, drawing himself up. Then he sloughed back and softly cursed the cards just placed on the table. The player his curses were directed at smirked and used hand talk to remind the Nara he was deaf and couldn’t hear the insults. The Nara helpfully started cursing with his hands too and soon the entire table was engrossed in their argument.

Jiraiya watched them silently, considering his next move. He could demand more information. Neither clan member seemed to be more than a Chuunin and the civilians looked unimportant. He had rank on all of them.

“Little Lady,” he said to the long ignored woman next to him. “Get me another drink and a fresh pitcher for the table there.” He waved a handful of coins as she pushed herself off her stool and stood on her heeled shoes once more. Jiraiya hesitated for a moment, then added a bit more. “You should
go after that, get yourself some sleep.”

A flash of genuine emotions flashed over the woman’s made-up face and she took the money without her customary coyness. “Yes sir,”

Jiraiya watched her go then turned back to look at the card players, they were continuing their game, scowls on their faces. It couldn’t hurt to try talking a bit with them.

“So, tell me how you became involved in book writing.”

“It was the strangest thing. I was just there to get my free drink - for the War Anniversary you understand? And this whirlwind of a girl starts asking for pens and tearing apart a book for re-writing…

*I*

“I have to go-” Obito finally said, as dawn threatened to intrude. “I-” she sighed and failed to stir herself from their comfortable perch within the tree’s wide branches.

Kakashi made no attempt to untangle himself from her embrace. Moving meant the night was over and they had to go back to dealing with the mountain of problems they each faced. “I don’t want you to go back to them.” he said softly to the girl curled up against him. “I want-” you to stay with me, he didn’t say. There was no point. Obito would never leave her family.

“Will the ANBU watch care if they see me slip in?” Obito asked softly, untucking her knee from his lap. She massaged feeling back into the stump slowly, unconcerned that Kakashi went rigid at her casual remark.

“You know,” Kakashi muttered, bracing for the venom and vitriol he deserved for keeping such information from Obito.

Obito patted his cheek gently, looking away from her hands to start picking off of stray leaves on them both. “Random remark from an uncle, same deal as with Naruto. Everyone knew but me.” She reached up and started picking out leaf from his hair, smiling reassuringly at his worried look. “I’m not mad at you. I learn from my mistakes. I know you couldn’t tell me and you would have if you could-”

“I wanted to tell you.” Kakashi said softly, catching one of her hands to kiss and hold close. “I would tell you everything if I could.” He stared down at her soft expression and wished he had a way to take the remaining grief from her shoulders.

“Thank-you.” Reluctantly Obito pulled away straightening her clothing. “If you can help me get home without anyone seeing me, I’d appreciate it. I have a lot I need to do…” She picked at the dark sleeves of her mourning outfit. “…Inabi knows about us.”

“Alright.” Multiple reactions, varying from outright murder to bribery flashed through his mind. Inabi Uchiha had more ambition and drive than talent, he would be easy to defeat but not to threaten…

“He knows and he wants to help. By marrying me…” Obito still didn’t look up at him. “We can go on as we have and he’ll keep quiet about it, as long as he gets the prestige of being head of my branchline. It has potential.”

“No.” Kakashi said simply.
“Just listen- he won’t expect me to actually do all the wifey things, just pretend we are-”

“No.” The reasoning was hard to explain but the feeling was simple.

“But-” Finally Obito looked up at him again, taken aback by his firm rejection.

“I don’t care what he promises you or what you think you can achieve- we’re not going to hide what we are to each other for the rest of our lives. You- we deserve better.”

“But…” Obito swallowed. “If I-,” she raised her hands towards him, then clenched them and held them to her chest. “I know we never really talked about it…. But I do want kids someday Kakashi. I want to raise a family… the right way, with a childhood we never got… I know you don’t want any of that-”

“I want you to be happy.” Kakashi said steadily, fighting the urge to run. He had reached his threshold for emotional vulnerability. But if he left now, he would lose everything. “If children are what you need…” He pushed back the overwhelming panic that fatherhood and all the nightmares it ensuemed. “You told me to never speak of marriage. So I never did.”

Obito stared at him. Tears were rising in her stunned eyes. She opened her mouth. Closed it. Grabbed at his hands and yanked him closer to her scowling face. “Are you serious? This isn’t guilt or a duty-thing? You want to marry me?”

“I want you to be safe and happy and loved. If marrying you will give you that, then I’ll do it. Not some conniving underling who stole your lunch when we were kids.”

Obito let out an unexpected bark of laughter. “You remember that?”

“I remember how the other Uchiha children told you to deal with Inabi yourself, but whenever they had trouble with anything they always turned to you for help. And you always gave it…” Kakashi ran a hand over her shaking back. “I know you love them and they love you, but your family has a terrible record of turning on you when you don’t do what they think you should. I’m sure Inabi means everything he promised you, but he’ll twist things to suit himself as soon as it’s convenient.”

“And you won’t?” Her voice was soft.

“I know you won’t let me. You always treated me like your equal.” When Kakashi was the genius of the Academy, when he was the orphaned son of a disgraced traitor. When Kakashi first met his new genin team, with all his nine year old Chuunin pride and Obito had promptly fought him to be team leader… Obito had never thought herself his inferer. And slowly, Kakashi had learnt to stop thinking of her as his superior.

“I want you to be happy. And… I want to be the one to make you happy-”

Obito was crying again.

* *

“You did WHAT?” Yuugao’s angry hiss echoed across the river dock as she stared at her little cousin, knee deep in fish guts and still with another basket of silverpike for him to prep for the market.

“It wasn’t supposed to end the way it did!” Yelled back Chokorēto, dropping his gutting knife into his work apron. “Shiokaze had it all planned out, it made so much scene. We’d go to Ame with their rescued nin, earn the goodwill of the new Uzumaki head and be the first to return home-”
“There is no home.” Yuugao interrupted him hollowly. “There is nothing but ruins and cliffs where Uzushio once stood. Not even the fish can survive in the pools below.”

“How do you know?” Demanded Chokorēto, bringing up a hand to brush away his hair from his eyes. He had the same purple shade Yuugao had, both inheriting the colour from their grandfather. “No one has been back there in years.”

“I went back there five years ago, just after the war ended,” Yuugao admitted softly. “On an escort mission- we spent a week digging in the ruins and found nothing worth speaking of.” Kushina had held her while they wept, their bright hued hair whipping around them in the rough wind and harsh sunlight.

“Why didn’t you tell us?” demanded Chokorēto, still angry and defiant. There was no shame in his face at his crimes or the danger he had brought upon their community. “If I had known-”

“You did know. Everyone told you there was nothing left and it was not safe. Even if I had told you, you would have still believed Shiokaze.” Hikkakeru said moresly, bringing another haul of fish to the gutting area. “Because he told you what you wanted to believe. That you could escape this village and live a life of dreams and fantasies.”

“Navigator,” Yuugao bowed, hand over her heart. “If I had had any idea any of this was going on-”

“You would have put a stop to it.” Hikkakeru said approvingly. “Worry not child. Your allegiance has never been questioned. The Rookery knows your loyalty to your people is not threatened by your duties to Konoha. You will face no consequences for your cousin’s ill-advised actions.”

“So- the armour Chokorēto stole? It was put back?” Yuugao confirmed. The ANBU blacks Obito had sewn with her experimental Fuuinjutsu had been tested during the ANBU trials and found favour with most of the users. It was only the commanders and quartermasters who held back the official approval of the new equipment.

Soon one of the commanders was going to realise Kakashi had worn Obito’s Fuuinjutsu for over a year with nothing but good results. And then they’d have no excuse to hold back. Yuugao had a headband Obito had sewn, with beautiful cooling seals hidden on the inner side, that she refused to ever give up. It had been a birthday gift from Kakashi, which she would argue made it officially sanctioned by her squad captain.

“It’s all sorted out.” Hikkakeru assured her, “We’ve arranged for a small malfunction with the paper bombs next to the fabric to explain the three missing sets. No one will ever prove the children were involved in anything. Gyosan and Ebimaru just eloped to Tanzaku and we’ll get a letter announcing their safe arrival in three days.”

“So no harm was really done.” Chokorēto said smugly. Yuugao ached to slap him. He had no idea what life was like outside of their cut-off community on the river. They could so easily have the eyes and knives of Root on them at the slightest hint of their hidden talents. Yuugao’s lack of Fuuinjutsu knowledge was a calculated set up, to lull Danzo and his teammates into thinking the remnants of Uzushio had lost most of their Fuuinjutsu knowledge. In one afternoon, her life of sacrifice could be ruined.

Hikkakeru hefted his own gutting knife and thrust it down into Chokorēto’s gutting board, narrowly missing his fingers. “Our community is under scrutiny because of your actions. Our school was visited by the police, more students will have to be sacrificed to the Academy in order to buy their silence. Fortunately.” Hikkakeru pulled out his knife and checked it for damage. “We have several children who have just proved they have a lot of talent and too much time on their hands.”
Chokorēto looked at the Rookery Leader in horror. “Us? Me? Go to the Academy? You have to serve as a shinobi for four years if you graduate there. No!”

“Yes.” Hikkakeru said simply. “You will go and you will do your absolute best. It’s time you remember we are all in the same boat together and those that don’t pull their weight, get thrown off the boat.”

*  

“Okay,” Obito sniffed and made an effort to pull herself together, using the high collar of the old mourning robe to wipe her face. “So, let me just confirm this: we’re talking about marriage here. Real marriage. You marrying me.” She gestured to herself, scared face, missing leg, general bedraggled appearance.

“I would marry you today if I could.” Kakashi said simply.

Obito blushed and scrunched up her face to try and hold back her giant grin. She needed to stay on track.

“Yes but, it still wouldn’t solve our problems. My clan would still have control over us even if you dropped your clan and joined us like Daisuke did for Naomi…” Obito remembered the wedding, Daisuke taking off his small clan mon for a much bigger Uchiwa symbol on his wedding robe, his family being given golden fans to symbolise him being paid for by the Uchiha.

“Wait,” Obito said slowly, her grin fading away as various details and facts came together in her mind. Kakashi looked at her hopefully, as if he had expected her to come up with a solution.

“There’s an old law. We would have to go check a law book and get down the exact details and requirements but- It’s still legal and in use. My parents used it. When someone wants to leave their clan,” a stab of panic at that statement because if she wasn’t Obito Uchiha then what was she? Just Obito the cripple. Just the washed out shinobi. Just the scarred, defective Prisoner of War-

No.

Just a Fuuinjutsu user on the way to masterhood. Just a disabled, but totally competent Tower worker with a decent job, good income and a growing bank account. Just a Konoha citizen with friends in the guildhall, the Tower, most of the major clans and quite a lot of other people from all walks of life. Just a grown woman sitting in the lap of one of the most deadly ANBU captains currently active, who loved and wanted to marry her.

If Obito Uchiha became Obito Hatake then she would still have all that and more.

She took a deep breath and started again. “If a consenting adult disappears from their clan lands, leaving payment and the symbol of another clan. If they are not be found within three days… Then they officially are no longer a member of that clan and join whichever clan or family that hide them…” Obito frowned, biting her lip. “I’m sure it’s more complicated than that, but that’s the general idea.”

“You- want to become a Hatake?” Kakashi said slowly, concern in his eyes.

“I want a clan I can trust. I trust you. And you’re the only Hatake I have to worry about.”

“Yes, but,” Kakashi clenched his fist. “There are drawbacks to the Hatake name-”

“Like half the village suspecting you’re responsible for the Kyuubi attack and the other half just
hating you for being police?” Obito asked dryly, taking his fist and gently pulling it open. “Whose clan is currently under surveillance by ANBU right now, Kashi?” She kissed his open palm. “I know about your dad and how people treated him and you. I know it still hurts and it’s not all gone away but- I don’t expect perfection and village wide approval. I know we’re going to upset a lot of people. I just want a better life than what I’ve got now.” She frowned to herself. “We’re gonna need a better place to live than your flat. I love you but we’ll drive each other mad in that amount of space. You need alone time. I need to spread out my stuff.”

“I can get us a bigger home,” Kakashi said, still looking conflicted, “In the ANBU barracks or use the housing allotment. That won’t be a problem. The council- the Hokage- I have a duty to the village to have children-”

“Fuck the village,” Obito said reactively, pulled away and almost falling from his lap. “I’m not having kids with anyone out of obligation, not even you!” The branches above them dropped leaves at her violent recoil.

“Let me finish,” Kakashi said, keeping a grip on her side to help her balance on his legs but not pulling her back into his embrace. “I was told I should, but I never intended to. I couldn’t see myself ever being able to do so, bringing children into this world. Except maybe with you.” His face softened, “You wouldn’t let me or anyone force them- even if they did have the talent, even if there was a need, you’d keep them from-”

“I will murder anyone - husband, clan head or Hokage - who tried to make my babies soldiers before they’re ready.” Obito hissed, leaning into his face, teeth bared. Her eyes bleed into red as memories of tiny Kakashi and his tiny headband flashed through her mind, along with small sincere Itachi in his and a sobbing Shishu with his own. “Ten isn’t ready, eight isn’t ready, five sure as hell was never and will never be-” Kakashi kissed her hard, over her raised upper lip and bared teeth, pulling her back into his arms.

Obito’s protective rage turned to another kind of heat and happily let her mouth be devoured, her tongue coaxed into play and her eyes went back to black as pleasure ran up her spine.

“So,” she finally said, breaking away for a moment, “Not obligation then?”

“Never.” Kakashi swore with another kiss.

* 

“I don’t see the problem.” Fugaku finally said, into the pause of the argument between the three women. “Obito’s eighteen, a Fuuinjutsu user and she almost certainly saw the tablets through Kamo’s memories. She’s an adult by all our standards-”

“No she’s not.” insisted Ranma and Izanami in unison, before turning to glare at each other. Mikoto meanwhile said nothing but gave her husband an approving smolder.

“That girl can not be rewarded for her outrageous behaviour!”

“No she’s not.” insisted Ranma and Izanami in unison, before turning to glare at each other. Mikoto meanwhile said nothing but gave her husband an approving smolder.

“That girl can not be rewarded for her outrageous behaviour!”

“Please Lord Fugaku, Obito’s been through so much. She’s not ready for the pressure of adulthood.”

“You were in favour of Obito becoming an adult a week ago. Stop being so fickle and pick a side.” Ranma demanded of Izanami, waving her black sleeve at between herself and Mikoto.

“That was before Kamo died! I don’t want her to forever link adulthood to his death. Or be forced to make decisions while she’s still grief stuck.” Nervously, Izanami fussed over the tea set, gathering together the long cold cups. “She might do something foolish.”
“If you think Obito can be stopped from doing whatever she decides she needs to do, then you really
don’t know your niece.” Mikoto pointed out quietly.

Fugaku held his peace. Technically he was clan head and could make his own decision on this
matter, since there was currently no branch head for Obito’s family line. In reality each of these
women could undermine him in a dozen little ways if he didn’t handle the matter carefully.

Izanami dared to glare at Mikoto for her accusation. “I know Obito. I raised her. I’m the closest thing
to a mother she has ever known-”

“Oh how fast you wave away any mention of Akena, the civilian woman that actually raised her.”
Ranma observed coolly. “You’ve over played the small part you had in Obito’s life and I’m sick of
indulging you. Her grandparents raised Obito and until we can be sure their influence has been
rooted out of her we can not-”

“Kamo’s ashes have not yet settled and already you insult his name.” Mikoto observed. “A woman
with a great-grandchild on the way and a grandson trying out for ANBU shouldn’t risk insulting the
ancestors.”

“Are you threatening me, Red Hawk?” Ranma demanded.

“Of course not honored Elder. If I wanted to threaten you, I would come out and say it.”

“You laid down your sword-” A hiss came from Izunami at that, mention of Mikoto’s humiliation by
the council was not to be spoken of, especially to her face.

“I don’t need a sword to hurt people.”

“Alright,” Fugaku put his hand between them, before the fight could escalate beyond acid tones and
arch looks. “You are both very capable women and equally threatening. Mikoto, please tell us your
reasoning that Obito should be known as an adult.”

“Obito being considered underaged has done nothing to hamper her trouble making or her attitude.
She flaunts whatever rules she wants with no real consequences-”

“Mikoto gave the woman a look often seen on Itachi’s face. The look of confusion that anyone
couldn’t see what was completely obvious to him. Fugaku was so relieved Sasuke had yet to learn it.

“Obito has come so far, recovered from so much,” Izanami said softly into the silence. “I don’t want
her to relapse under pressure.”

“She was bound to the compound for months.”

“She’s a Fuuinjutsu user! Our wall seals are a joke to those who know them. I used to go out with
Kush-” Mikoto stopped herself abruptly, her face losing all animation and life. Fugaku discreetly put
his hand over hers. That senseless loss still hurt her, even after four years.

“Obito has come so far, recovered from so much,” Izanami said softly into the silence. “I don’t want
her to relapse under pressure.”

“I think she’ll rise up to the challenge, she always has before.” Ranma countered. “Don’t mistake us
Fugaku, we all love Obito, that’s why it’s so important we handle her carefully. She has to
understand her place in the clan, before she gets any further responsibility.”
“Yes,” Fugaku frowned to himself. Obito’s show of strength at her party had shocked him, but justified or not, clan members simply could not scream at every Sharingan bearer in the clan and come away unpunished.

“Let’s set aside the issue for now and let her stew. Let Kamo’s death settle for everyone before we press on. There’s no rush. Obito’s not going anywhere.”

* *

“And then, if it all works out,” Obito continued as they landed quietly in a blind spot between the ANBU observation point and the Uchiha compound. “Without upsetting too many people, we might be able to convince the Hokage into letting us have contact with Naruto. I’m gonna have to make up with Jiraiya…”

“You two do have a lot to talk about,” Admitted Kakashi, gently letting go of her waist to let her stand unaided. “That would be nice.”

“It would make sense. We’re not a threat to anyone in the village, I’ll be a proper Fuuinjutsu user soon enough, you’re an ANBU. It makes sense from a practical point, as well as emotional.”

“I can think of a few obstacles to that argument,” Kakashi pressed his cheeks to hers, mask back in place. “But you’re good at obstacles.”

Obito pressed back, taking in his scent and reaching down under her shirt.

“Obito! This really isn’t the time or place!” Kakashi stammered, feeling his cheeks flush under his mask.

Obito rolled her eyes and pulled out her trusty knife, still warm from being pressed against her body. “You’re supposed to swap gifts when you get betrothed-”

“You’ve given me everything-”

“Just take the knife, Kakashi.”

Kakashi hesitantly reached to take the knife - once a long machete snapped in half over Obito’s back, stolen and sharpened to a wedge shaped point by her cell mate, Obito’s constant companion and last resource for more than four years. It looked ridiculous. Kakashi took a deep breath and put his hand back, reaching to his back weapons pouch. He pulled out from that pouch what Obito thought was an empty sword handle, only to see it had the ragged remains of a snapped blade sticking out from the handle.

When Kakashi offered it to her, Obito realised what it was.

“That’s- it’s your-,” she stuttered. “You never got it fixed- you carry it around with you?” she demanded running a cautious finger over the steel of the White Fang’s infamous tantō. Kakashi had shattered it saving her hapless ass when they went back to rescue Rin from the Iwa nin.

“I hadn’t touched it since the mission.” Kakashi admitted, putting his free hand over the handle of Obito’s knife. “I couldn’t bring myself to look at it. But I took it with me on this mission. I thought, if you can move forward, then I should at least try to get it fixed. It’s yours now.”

“I don’t even have Lighting Chakra,” Obito argued, even as she put her free hand over the handle. They stood for a moment, hands held together over two very different weapons, both broken but both still worth so much. “But thank you... I'll treasure it. I know how important it is to you, and...
you saved my life with it. It's a symbol of your dedication, and how far we’ve come. I love it.”

* 

“We just want to talk.” One of the three cloaked figures called to Roshi, their voice carrying easily in the emptiness of the scrub land.

“Sure you do.” Roshi replied, gesturing to his smaller companion to get closer behind him, as he finally turned to confront the people who had been following them for hours. He had hoped to reach a better defensive spot before they confronted their stalkers, but Roshi wasn’t too concerned. It wouldn’t take a lot to drive them away.

“On my parents’ grave. I swear, you and the boy can go free after I finish my talk.” The lead figure spoke again, putting out a hand to pull down his hood and reveal his head. A headband of four vertical strips glinted in the light on his bright red hair.

Roshi raised an eyebrow, and did not take his eyes off the man waving his hands innocently. Behind him Deidara remained tense, ready to set a flock of clay birds at the stranger. “I haven’t seen Ame nin about in the world since the end of the war. Did someone finally kill the Salamander?”

The unhooded man smiled widely. “He decided to retire and serve as an advisor to the new head. Ame is about to start taking a new direction in policy. We want to truly make a difference and move towards peace.”

“Right.” Roshi gathered chakra to his hands and got ready to throw lava. He twitched his head slightly, indicating that Deidara needed to get one of his big clay birds ready for flight. “And you approached me just for my good looks…”

“Umm I’m sure you look nice under the bandana?” The grinning stranger rubbed his hair awkwardly. “But actually it’s cause you’re a Jinchuuriki? And probably an Uzumaki too?”

Roshi took a deep breath. “What of it?”

“We’ve heard how you guys are treated, the injustices you’ve suffered after your village fell. We want to stop all that. Stop it for good.” The stranger explained, the black clouds of his cloak flapping as he gestured dramatically.

“I mean - it’s all because of Konoha isn’t it? They’re the ones that created the first shinobi village and started the wars. And gave out the beasts and method for sealing them into new victims every few years. If we take them out then we can really start fixing things!” The Ame nin nodded enthusiastically to his own words.

“Except,” Roshi pointed out dryly, even as Son Goku stirred in his belly. “The small fact that Konoha is full of people capable of restraining the beasts. The Mokuton, the Sharingan, all their sealmasters. Most Uzushio refugees went to Konoha after their village was destroyed. Kiri once had the same idea and look how it turned out for them.”

“Ah. We’re not as foolhardy as Kiri. The old Salamander is still around to teach us patience. The Mokuton is gone, the seal masters are dying out and as for the Sharingan?” Yahiko smiled “We have plans for the Uchiha. Big plans.”

Chapter End Notes
Dun dun dun!!!!
And now with that out of my system we can get to the happy childhood of Naruto where everything is good and simple.

... Just kidding. I mean there will be happy Naruto adopting, but it’s not gonna be simple at all.

In an unrelated note: what would be a good name for a kid… say if you wanted to subtly name them after Rin. Is there a Japaneses name that can mean ‘peal/ring of laughter’?

If no one will give me shinobi betrothal customs I will be forced to make-up my own! Rings are out, knifes are in! Someone tell me how a shinobi gets married or I’m gonna bastardised shinto customs. I really like the idea that having a witness to a wedding is a westernised custom, that you don’t need a witness or priest.

Send me your thoughts, objections, favorite parts, criticisms and dying noises. My tumblr is Jemsquash, with an icon of a mountain. tag for this fi c ‘the remaking of things’. Come read my incoherent babbling about naruto meta. Also I worked out people have bookmarked the whole series and I loved reading what you’ve all put down as notes for them. It gave me the final push I needed.

(I’m going to have to do so much plotting! What even is going on outside of Konoha? Kiri: busy with clan purges and Orochimaru, Ame: original Akatsuki in charge, Suna: making war on Iwa while wondering who poisoned the Raikage with their poison, Iwa: wondering why Suna is attacking them and where their Human weapons went, Kumo: pissed and waiting for the slightest excuse to fight anyone and everyone... It’ll be fine)

Special thanks as ever to the efficient Yulia Leafhill, who’s betaing and notes make me so happy.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!