I Never Realized How Small Konoha Was
by MiloOfTheKey

Summary

Noa was a normal teenage girl - until she got reborn into the Elemental Nations.

"I never realized how small Konoha was.

I grew up in another world - one without chakra - as a normal, teenage girl who just happened to have read Naruto a couple of times. And then I somehow ended up here."
If you can, I hope you choose to suspend your skepticism long enough to give this fic a shot.

This kind of "oh no! I ended up in a book" cliche plot line can be a turn off for a lot of people - and I understand that. So can original characters. But please give my fic a read if you're willing.

But hey! If you don't feel like it - don't! I want my readers to enjoy reading this story - not just read it because some girl said so in the notes.

If you do like the story - feel free to give it a kudos, subscribe, or leave a comment below.

Thanks! And enjoy!

--MiloOfTheKey

See the end of the work for more notes.
PROLOUGE

Chapter Summary

Being reborn into another universe is ... odder than Noa thought it would be.

Underlined - English

I never realized how small Konoha was.

I grew up in another world - one without chakra - as a normal, teenage girl who just happened to have read Naruto a couple of times. And then I somehow ended up here.

I thought it was a dream at first. Then my reasoning caught up to my assumptions and I realised that it wasn’t a dream. I had lucid dreamed all my previous life. I knew when I wasn’t awake.

Still, it took 3 years and the learning of an entirely different language and culture that I in no way was I smart enough to make up to really convince myself.

But reading about Konoha wasn’t the same as living in it. In my first life I lived in New Jersey for a time - I had been to NYC. The most prominent building in the village - the flaming red Hokage Tower - was maybe five stories tall. Six? Nothing compared to New York or Chicago’s towering sky scrapers.

The Hokage Monument reminded me eerily of Mount Rushmore, and the Memorial Stone was like a much smaller Vietnam Memorial. Even if I hadn’t seen either of them in real life, I did see pictures.

But I wasn’t complaining. Before Jersey I lived in a more rural city in Ohio - maybe 20,000 people in the town. Konoha is much closer to my old hometown’s size than New York or Jersey ever were.

Living in the Red Light District was not pleasant. I may have lived a rather sheltered first life, but that didn’t mean that I wasn’t fully aware of the risks involved in those kinds of places. You didn’t have to go to a brothel to know to avoid one. You didn’t have to meet an angry drunk to know to turn around when you hear one.

A normal four year old would be dead - or traumatized - by now. It really was lucky I wasn’t normal.

The only perks are that now I know this city inside and out - and I picked up some skills along the way.

Never thought I would end up a pickpocket.

Oh well. That bitch tried to kick Ruto. What goes around comes around.

I didn’t actually intend to meet Naruto. I actually kinda forgot about him.
It’s very difficult to forget about the main character of a book series you read a least three times - but when I arrived in Konoha I was more focused on how I could survive thenow and set up groundwork for the later that I had pushed him to the back of my mind.

So when I saw some druggies from the Red Light District ganging up on a kid - I didn’t stop to think that it could’ve been a “character” I know before intervening.

(After living here for long enough - it’s too difficult to think of these people only as characters in a book. They’re as real as I was.)

I threw a rock at one of the druggies and drop kicked the other in the back of her knee. Grabbing the arm of the cowering kid, we ran.

I had used the money I swiped from those assholes to buy him ramen, and only then did it hit me. Asking his name only confirmed it.

I said I had no place to live. He said he did. He asked if I wanted to stay with him. I said I did. He said he wanted to call me Aneki. I said he’d be my Ruto-nii.

He hasn’t left me alone since.

All it took was for me to cut my hand on a rusty door, swear like a sailor in English, and blush sheepishly for Ruto to be determined to learn “my language.” It took a while, but as they say: ‘The better you are the sooner you start.’

Or something.

I was still surprised that I even learned … was it Japanese? I guess it would be.

I was terrible at Spanish in my last life.

Ruto picked it up fast though. I was impressed.

Soon the both of us started to do what Ruto called “mixing.” We’d start one sentence or thought in one language, and when we had trouble finishing it with our limited vocabularies, so we’d finish it in another. Eventually it just became how we talked, and despite how odd it was I felt that this way I was learning more than I would’ve when I was speaking just Japanese. I felt like I knew more. Understood more.

Ruto - in his own way - explained that he felt the same.

We really began to feel like a family.

The way I met Uchiha Sasuke was only slightly more intentional than when I had met Ruto. I had been wondering how to deal with the upcoming Massacre. I was physically 5 - and had been in Konoha for little more than a year. I remembered - vaguely - from my past life that the Massacre happened when Sasuke was either 5 or 6. That meant that I had a year tops to plan.

I knew that I couldn’t stop the Massacre. There was no way. I wasn’t smart, powerful, political, or influential enough to stop Danzo at all.

But I might be able to lessen the fallout.
The same day I decided that I would try to enter the Academy with Ruto in order to meet Sasuke and befriend him - I ran into him.

Literally.

I landed on my pre-pubescent, boney butt.

It hurt. But not a lot.

I was mentally 19 after all.

Sasuke was cute. A frankly adorable kid. However, I was never really one for crushes. Or pining. Or fangirling.

Or boys really. Honestly, girls were way better. Much cuter too.

But I digress.

Who knew that running into a kid on the playground, not crying, smiling, and asking how he got a cut on his thumb was the way to befriend a possible future Avenger?

Not I!

But somehow, after finding out that I wanted to be a shinobi and didn’t know how to throw a kunai or a shuriken, there I was.

Throwing kunai. And shuriken.

With Uchiha Itachi and Uchiha Shisui as my instructors.

Well Itachi was instructing. Shisui was too busy teasing Itachi about how Sasuke already had a girlfriend.

Ew. No. I prefer men my age thank you. Or nonexistent.


Somehow I was tolerable enough to Itachi, funny enough to Shisui, and friendly enough to Sasuke that I became “Sasuke’s little friend.”

At least I wasn’t his “little girlfriend.”

Gross.

With my luck - and my growing circle of prodigies - it didn’t take long for me to gain some … attention.

Maybe it had to do with how I was completely untrained in every way and was already figuring out - on my own - how to mold chakra and make it do things that no one else ever considered.

Honestly. Wasn’t there some saying? How ”much could be done when there is ignorance of the impossible.”

Or something.

From what I could tell about this world, hand signs were used as a medium to focus chakra - to get
it to mold the way you wanted them to. Like a magic wand. No wand, no magic. But that kind of logic got me thinking - if chakra is kinda like magic and hand seals are the wand, could you do wandless magic?

I wondered if I could think “result first, then mold the chakra to get the result” rather than “mold the chakra to get the result.”

If I could focus on what I wanted to get done and then trial and error until I could mold my chakra - without fancy hand signs - to get that result, then maybe I could do jutsu without proper training first.

I went ahead and experimented. I hated being unable to defend myself in this kind of world.

But apparently, physically manifesting your chakra into a tangible state and playing with it like silly putty is a good way to alert high ranking ninja that you are a person of interest.

I hate being a person of interest.

They were suspicious, and I got that. I was a strange, foreign girl who was too smart for her age, living with their Jinchuriki, and speaking a foreign tongue they had literally never heard before.

I would be worried if they weren’t suspicious.

Even so, the ANBU guard - that I wasn’t entirely sure how I could detect - was just annoying at this point.

I heard a lot of griping from Shisui once - when I asked about the specifics of how shushin mechanics worked - that theory was important, but it was a pain in the ass and didn’t always apply.

(I love being around Shisui. I pick up so many Japanese swear words.)

I disagreed however. It was only the theory that made it so I could do my jutsu - that Ruto gave the English name of them being my “tricks” - and so I pressed on about the theory.

Apparently asking the meaning of simple Japanese terms and then mispronouncing them in a way only a foreigner could is a good shortcut to getting on a shinobi’s List of People That Seem Suspicious and Need Investigation and/or a Visit Down To T/I.

I don’t like being on that List. Its worse than having an ANBU watch.

Shisui collaborated with Itachi - who already seemed to glare at me more than the Uchiha normal - in subtly pestering me about my past and how I grew up. I subtly told them to fuck off.

So we tiptoed around each other for a while. Nearly a month.

Then Sasuke met Ruto.

Apparently that rivalry was destined to live on no matter what dimension or timeline.

Itachi and I sighed simultaneously when they declared a contest to see who got to take me to dinner. Shisui - the bastard - laughed his ass off in the back. I may have used a trick to trip him into some mud, but I’ll never tell.

Unfortunately, Itachi - that damn eleven year old genius - noticed.
I have never had to lie so much in my life - either of them.

But now the Uchiha posses the knowledge that “my parents were nomadic people that were headed to Konoha so I could live with my aunt because they didn’t want me living their life but they died in the Kyuubi attack and my aunt had to take me in but she was in the Red Light District and no I didn’t know her real name she was Auntie to me and yes that means Auntie and no I don’t know where my parents were from and no I didn’t ask - history is boring - and yes I care about Konoha and yes I was loyal to the Hokage and no I wasn’t dating Sasuke OR Naruto and yes I was sure.”

Shisui seemed to believe me. But he’s a ninja - who the hell knows what he was really thinking.

Itachi was Itachi. I ain’t going to try and crack that Da Vinci Code thankyouverymuch.

I wasn’t shipped off to T/I, so I count that as my win.

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Apparently, Ruto and I both could sense the ANBU that followed us around. Together we collaborated to give masks and names to each chakra signature. We gave them English names based off their masks, and wrote up stats on each ability of each ANBU.

Stats like how Hawk was a better tracker, but Lizard had better endurance.

And how pulling pranks when Dog was on duty was just asking to be caught.

All written and discussed in English of course. It was kinda funny that Ruto's handwriting was better in English letters than his own, native kanji.

It was surprising how the stats actually came in handy - Ruto used them to cut down on how many times he got caught during a prank.

Still got caught a lot, though.

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Ruto and I decided to only mix speak or speak English when we were alone (or as alone as we could be with two ANBU guard rotations) so people wouldn’t be more suspicious of either of us. It was harder than we thought - because so much of our ways of thinking now mixed the two languages. It was eventual that one of us would slip up.

But it was just my luck that Ruto would slip up and mix languages in front of the Hokage.

At least Ruto now remembers that the word annoying is actually an English word.

But then the summons to Hokage Tower came.

At least he did his research. I was almost flattered. The Sandaime Hokage had an entire manilla folder and Shisui and Itachi to help formulate his opinion on how soon I needed to be executed.

If I was going to die, ideally they’d kill me before puberty. I really don’t need to go through that again.

But I was surprised. The Sandaime was actually kinda nice - in a grandfatherly way. Except the part where he released enough KI to down a water buffalo just to see what my reaction would be.

I nearly fainted. I did not actually faint. I just swayed dangerously and felt like a strong exhale would knock me over.
Shisui didn’t fare *too* much better than I.

Then he proceeded to grandfatherly interrogate me.

I didn't even *know* you could interrogate someone in a grandfather-y way!

It’s a good thing I did that one school play in my last life. My acting ability was being put to the test.

(It’s also a good thing I remembered my story from before.)

I still haven’t met any Yamanaka or Morino Ibiki. I guess I passed.

Passed enough to get another grandfatherly smile and an admittance into the Academy, at least.

And here I am. Waiting in the courtyard of the Academy field, a hyperactive Ruto bouncing about next to me and a pouting Sasuke on my other side.

I’m officially starting my training as a shinobi.

I read about that war. No way in hell am I standing by while Ruto and Sasuke fight on the front lines of it.
I sigh. This is going to be a very long class period if this keeps up.

I take a deep breath, “Noa.”

Breath. “Noa. Noa!”

Deep breath. “NOA!”

I see her jolt awake as I scream in her ear, immediately behind her chair with a kunai in her hand. As her tired eyes focus on me, I see her relax only to tense up again. Smart girl. I may not be an enemy nin trying to attack her, but I am a chunin-sensei who is sick and tired of the same old routine.

I stare her down with a well practiced ‘I am disappointed but not surprised’ face while I hear the class giggle and snort around us. Naruto mumbled something to Sasuke, and I hear the Last Uchiha snort quietly in response.

(Oh, what would’ve happened to Sasuke if Naruto and Noa weren’t there for him? I don’t even want to think about it.)

Noa whips around and maturely sticks her tongue out in response to Naruto’s undoubtedly snide remark. When she turns back to me, however, she is blushing sheepishly.

“Oh … Hey there Iruka-Sensei! What’s up?”

This elicits yet another snarky comment from Naruto, although this time in the strange foreign tongue that Noa taught both him and Sasuke.

Sasuke almost grinned this time. I know that Noa is only drawing this out for humor, and only for the benefit of her ‘brothers.’ She was far more behaved before the Massacre.

And because I am not heartless, I’m willing to play along for Sasuke’s sake. “I am disappointed to have to say it again, Noa. But when break is over, you must stop sleeping on your desk.” I say with a menacingly sweet smile.

Of course, Noa has always been borderline disturbingly unflappable when it comes to being
intimidated, but she milks it as much as I do. “I wasn’t sleeping!” She exclaims with faked indignance, “I was … uh … I was meditating!”

I have to stomp down my smile at that. About a week ago, after the consistent napping really had gone on too long to leave alone, I had pulled Noa aside. I had asked her point blank why she felt the need to sleep in class. She had answered point blank that she wasn’t sleeping but meditating during breaks to practice chakra control - but got so focused that she couldn’t always register when she needed to “come back to the land of the living,” as she said.

Using the real reason as a cheap excuse. Noa was going to be a fine shinobi one day.

“Sure. Then you wouldn’t mind demonstrating your knowledge on our current political relationships between the Land of Fire and the Land of Tea?”

A flicker of confusion crosses Noa’s face, and too late I realize my mistake. Despite how precocious Noa was, her vocabulary was mostly limited to what words Naruto - and occasionally the stoic Sasuke - knew. There was no way that the near-silent Uchiha nor the hyperactive knucklehead would’ve use “demonstrating” in a sentence around Noa.

I was just about to rephrase, when she shocks me by turning around sharply. She struts straight up to the classes second sleeping figure, half hidden from my view - intentionally I’m sure - by Choji’s larger form. The class looks on in confusion as Noa dances over to the sleeping form of Nara Shikamaru and shakes his shoulder roughly.

Casting a sideways glance at Naruto who looks just as confused as I felt) and Sasuke (emotionless as ever) I can tell that this is a recent development. And that was interesting. I’d rarely seen either boy without Noa by their side, and even more rarely seen Noa without at least one of them. If they didn’t know about this relationship, it was new. And if this goes well, close. Not many can get away with waking a Nara and still staying in their good graces.

Shikamaru smacked at Noa’s hand sleepily, but she continues at it to no avail. Gritting her teeth visibly, she takes a deep breath and leans in close.

“OI! STAG!” She bellows right into his ear.

I have no idea what she said, but Sasuke again looks amused and Naruto is cracking up. Shikamaru himself shoots up in his chair, then relaxes and glares at the foreign girl. “What?” He grumbles. Oh, if looks could kill.

Noa looks smug, and crosses her arms. “Good morning, Stag! What does “demonstrating” mean?”

The class looks at Noa like she was clinically insane, and I feel a similar look cross my face before I can school my features. Did she honestly expect that -

“It means showing. Proving. Something like that.”

Great. It’s spreading. This language is infecting my students. Ugh, I need to learn it before things get too out of hand.

Naruto looks shocked, and even Sasuke looks vaguely peeved.

Noa’s lips form a little “oh” and she turns around and gives an exaggeratedly annoyed look at me. “If you wanted me to show off, you coulda just said so!”
Even weeks later, an odd precedent was set. Shikamaru, somewhere along the way, became Noa’s personal dictionary. Whenever Noa needed a word defined or a concept explained, she no longer turned to Naruto but to the Nara Heir.

I sit back and watch Noa skip over to Shikamaru during break - presumably to ask about some of the theories about Nature Chakra. Surprisingly, the lazy genius deigned to sit up and - even if his head was only upright because it was in his hands - look at her as she came over.

I didn’t know how to feel about this.

When the Hokage had asked me to be the chunin-sensei for Naruto, he didn’t mention Noa until I had already agreed to do it. He hadn’t gone in depth, but had mentioned that there was a foreign, orphaned girl who was friends with Naruto who I should keep an eye on.

My automatic response was to think of her as a possible threat, but the Sandaime had assured me that she was only an untested talent that may need extra help with the basics.

The first day of class was filled with anticipation. I was going to be the teacher of the host of the demon who killed my family. I expected fangs, snarls. Not a cheery boy with sunshine for hair that I couldn’t ever see hurting anyone. But even still, I was loath to trust - until Noa stepped in.

I don’t know if Noa ever figured out why people hated Naruto so much, but she clearly couldn’t stand for it. I was wary of the both of them: Naruto because of his status and Noa because of the Sandaime’s warning. Class went on for some time before Noa snapped.

I hadn’t even realized that I was being unfair to him. When I asked Noa later, she said what did it was my giving ‘Perfect Miss Ino’ fine pointers and compliments on her taijutsu when Naruto - who was right next to her at the time - was having trouble completing the kata.

Noa wasn’t physically intimidating: she grew up in the Red Light District and it showed. She was shorter than even Naruto and skinny to boot. Her skin was darker than even the tannest of Konoha’s citizens, but lighter than those of the Kumogakure. Her hair went down to the middle of her back in thick, frizzy, wild curls. Her hair wasn’t black - but rather a dark, dark brown that looked black in most lights and was streaked in red in others. Her bone structure was different than anyone that I have ever seen before - her face was softer, with a wide jaw and a larger - although still adorably cute - nose that turned up a bit at the end.

It was her eyes that stood out the most, however. Noa’s eyes were wide and expressive with thick, dark lashes. But most strikingly, her eyes were ever changing in the light. One day I could’ve sworn that they were an earthy brown, but a few minutes later they were as blue as the rivers that flowed through Fire Country. When they had locked eyes only earlier, they were a beautiful grey that mirrored the clouds in the sky. ‘Hazel’ was what I once heard her call them.

But when Noa had confronted me that day, there was no warmth. They were narrowed and dark like pitch. There was a fire there that forced him to step back from her.

All she asked was to see him after class.

When the classroom emptied at the end of the day, she finally let out her anger in the cool, controlled way that most shinobi feared.

“Do you - for a moment - think that Ruto asked to be hated?” Her voice shook with each syllable, and her unnamed accent came out bit by bit. “I am an orphan. I had nothing to offer Uzumaki
Naruto except the clothes on my back and the language of my people and he gave me a home. He gave me a roof over my head and food in my belly and a pillow under my head. But all I can do for him is follow his footsteps, to be his sister. So Iruka-sensei, I ask you this. I cannot help Naruto like he needs - he deserves - to be helped. I can’t. Will you?”

She had stormed out.

I became like a brother to Naruto.

We both felt better in the end.

Noa had been Naruto’s rock - what kept him grounded. When the Massacre happened, Sasuke too became dependant on the support that the young kunoichi had to give. Between the two of them, they had a rivalry both over ability and the attention of their young female friend. By adding Shikamaru into the mix …

The young girl was getting popular.

But then again, Noa didn’t teach her people’s language to just anyone. So how did Shikamaru earn enough of her trust to be taught it?
Chapter Summary

Shikamaru brings home girl. Shikaku doesn't know what to think about his now-bilingual son.

Underlined - English

NARA SHIKAKU

His son had brought a girl home.

Roughly 13 years earlier than what the Nara Head had expected.

Well, more like 9.5 years. Looks like he would have to give Shikamaru more credit in the future.

Unfortunately, the girl was the foreign orphan that lived with the Nine-Tails Jinchūriki and spoke a language that he had never heard before.

Him. The Nara Clan head and Jonin Commander.

His pride felt wounded, but no one would ever know.

Except Yoshino. And Inoichi. And Chouza.

But no one else.

It still was a surprise when little Shika dragged a slim, dark skinned girl with the most wild hair he’d ever seen through the house to the back porch just to teach her shogi.

The girl picked up the game rather quickly, only needing Shikamaru to explain one or two rules again before jumping right in. Her style was rough - customary of a newcomer to the game - but was a good first effort that was more in line with what first time adults would try, rather than ten year old and poorly educated orphans.

I grabbed a bottle of sake and a bowl and sat down on a cushion to watch them play. Hokage-sama may be confident that this girl was loyal to both Konoha and it’s people - but it never hurt to have a second opinion.

When I sat down, her body language shifted slightly. Her posture stiffened and she turned casually in her cushion so she could see both me and the door behind me better. It was unconscious, I was sure, but her microexpressions showed just how little she trusted me. She wasn’t focused so much on how to respond to a physical attack, it seemed; just to be ready to get out of there if she felt uncomfortable.

Understandable. She’s an orphan who grew up in the worst parts of Konoha and must’ve been
treated terribly because she lived with the “demon child.” I imagine she hates being around adults.

I smile lazily at her, and try to put her at ease by relaxing my body language and keeping my hands in her view. She relaxes incrementally, and Shika eyes me thankfully.

He was worried for her. How cute.

Eventually, after she loses the first game and they begin to set up their second, I break the still slightly tense atmosphere. “Shika-kun. I don’t believe you introduced me to your guest.”

I see my son’s shoulders tense up slightly, and a blush creep up his neck. The girl also saw this, and was trying - and failing - to keep a giggle from escaping from her lips.

“Tou-san. This is Noa - from the Academy. Noa, this is my Tou-san, Nara Shikaku.”

I smile again at her, warmer this time. “It’s nice to meet you Noa-chan.”

Noa’s eyebrows scrunch up almost imperceptibly, and turns to Shika, “Tou-san? That means Dad right?”

I cock an eyebrow at the unfamiliar word, and turn my gaze on my son as well, curious if he knows what she was saying.

He thinks for a moment, then nods once, “It’s a little more formal than Dad but less formal than Father. Somewhere in the middle.”

Noa nods, satisfied, and turns back to me, “Nice to meet you Lord Nara. Thank you for having me.”

I hide my confusion at the form of address and simply nod at her once. As she turns her attention to the game, I lock eyes with my son.

‘We’re talking about this later,’ I silently promise my son with a look.

“Troublesome,” he mutters.

Noa looks up, “Huh?”

Shika sighs again. “Nothing, you troublesome girl.”

She sticks her tongue out at him.

How cute.

Noa-chan leaves before dinner, insisting that she needed to be home to make sure that ‘Ruto eats something other than salt or chemicals.’

Once I can no longer hear her footsteps on the cobblestone, I turn to my son.

“Explain.”

Groaning, he flops down on the couch. As lazy as he may be, Shika knows better than to mess around when something as dangerous as a foreign nin is involved - even said foreign nin was 10
years old and has been under ANBU watch intermittently for six years.

“Noa has been in my class since I was 7,” My troublesome son began. “Ever since she and Uzumaki Naruto transferred over after some less serious students dropped out. I didn’t actually talk to her until earlier this week, because I was always around Ino and Choji and she always with Naruto and Uchiha Sasuke.”

I nod my understanding, and he continues, his posture straightening as the basics are done.

“Last week, I noticed that Noa was having difficulty reading from the textbook and understanding the concepts. I was confused, because she was really smart - not Nara smart but close - but simple things were tripping her up. I was curious, so eventually I asked her one day during lunch break, earlier this week.

“She told me that she was an orphan, and that she never had anyone teach her how to understand our language. She learned what everyone was saying by listening to other people talk, but she was limited to learning only the words that other people around her knew. Since she spent almost all of her childhood alone or with Naruto - who was also an orphan - and Sasuke - who barely talks - she never really learned any technical terms in ‘Common’ even if she was able to understand things she saw or did for herself because she had the words and ideas to explain it in her mother tongue, English.”

Shikamaru paused, collecting himself, “I asked her why she didn’t go to the library, and she told me she couldn’t read very well. She grew up with her Auntie - her Aunt - who could only write English.

“So you decided to help her, learning English in the meantime.” I concluded, stumbling slightly over the odd sounds of the unfamiliar word.

“Pretty much,” He nodded, scratching the bridge of his nose as he gathered his thoughts. “So I told her that I would help her read and write and understand what was being explained in class, but only if I could learn English while we did it. So for the last couple weeks while we went cloud watching she taught me words, and then I taught her how to say and write them in our language. She’s only here because she told me she’d never played shogi, only something similar, so we came here.”

I think this over as Shikamaru slumped back into the couch. I knew that I couldn’t ask Shikamaru to teach anyone else this ‘English.’ It would betray her trust in him, and was a cruel thing to ask of a ten year old, shinobi or no, but this girl’s relative goldmine of knowledge of words terms that no one in all of Konoha had ever heard before was too much to ignore. Shika knew this all, and explaining thoroughly he was trusting that my response would be a well thought out one. One that he would listen to, even if he disagreed.

“Keep teaching Noa-chan. And keep learning from her. I won’t ask either of you to share this knowledge, but at some point in the future someone else may.”

I can feel the tension ease out from him, and he slumps more comfortably into the couch. But then I remember something she said, “What was it that she called me? Something Nara?”

With his head limp against the back of the cushion, Shika laughs softly. “Oh, that. Troublesome. Noa doesn’t really get honorifics. Naruto never used them, so she wasn’t exposed to them almost at all. She gets so mixed up that she just omits them or uses English honorifics. Only problem, English doesn’t use honorifics in the same way. Titles come before the name. Plus they’re only used formally - never really casually - and first names are used far more loosely than we do.” My
Lord’ is the full formal address, but for you it isn’t like you are a daimyo or a prince or something so she just said ‘Lord Nara,’ which is an appropriate title for your position. If she as being informal, but still polite, she’d call you ‘Mister Nara.’”

I nod thoughtfully, cataloging this form of address for a later date. The Nara never were one's for formalities.

“Troublesome.” Shika mutters again.
GAI

Chapter Summary

Gai runs into Noa as she is training most youthfully! Kakashi can't stop Gai from doing something stupid.

Underlined - English

MAITO GAI

There is a most Youthful konoha blossom in training ground!

This is quite an unexpected - although not unwelcome - surprise! It is not often that Youthfully young genin of Konoha choose to most Youthfully train physically this early in the morning. Her katas are quite good - although admityaly also quite basic.

I burst into training ground 13 after a most Youthful 200 handstand-laps around the village and to greet the young Konoha blossom.

SHINK...THUD

"Fuck goddamn holy shit Green Beast of the fucking Leaf goddamn why?!!"

Ah, Foreign. How unexpected!

“How Youthful!” I exclaim, “You responded quite well to an unknown presence, and have much Youthful energy to exclaim such a greeting this early in the morning - even if I cannot understand you.”

I examine the kunai that was embedded in the trunk of the tree I was just standing in front of. Her aim really was quite impressive for her age, and she put a good amount of force behind it despite her size.

I narrowed my eyes. There is no makers mark on this blade - where did she get it?

“ Oh shit. Sorry!”

The knife shot out of the bark and back into the hand of the young girl, who was panting from the exertion. I could see now that she was using Chakra Strings to pull her blade back, but most likely didn’t have the stores to properly back it up yet.

With her lapse of concentration, there was a slight puff of chakra dust, and the Henge around the blade was released. I feel my eyes widen, and then bound closer to examine the blade properly.

“Oh, my most Youthful Konoha blossom! How Youthful to construct your own incredibly Youthful blade completely out of Chakra! Most impressive. Most impressive!”
“That’s a lot of ‘Youth,’” The girl mutters, but allows me to twist her hand with the blade every which way.

The blade was constructed entirely out of sapphire chakra that under this Youthful girl’s control had been sharpened into a blade with enough properly distributed weight to be thrown the same way as a kunai. When I had approached the Youthful genin, she had been running katas. Therefore, she had constructed an entire throwing knife, added a Henge, and attached a Chakra String in a split second.

Without any hand seals.

How Youthful!

“My, you most Youthful young Konoha lotus blossom! How magnificent it is that you have constructed such a knife! Where was it that you learned this most Youthful technique?”

I wonder if she could teach it to Lee. She was foreign - that much was obvious - and I had heard about the young foreign orphan who lived with the Uzumaki child. It was possible that her people had developed a different way of molding chakra that didn’t involve hand signs.

Unless it was a kekkei genkai, of course.

Didn’t hurt to ask.

She seemed to stumble over a response, and I realised that I had leaned in quite close to her face and still had her arm in my iron grip.

I lean back to standing. This seems only to intimidate her more. How odd! She seems quite intimidated of my most Youthful height! Although, I suppose that 184 cm (A/N just over 6 feet) must be quite intimidating to such a bud of a Konoha blossom.

“I uhhh. Um - I mean I kinda - fuck it what’s the term - made it up. Invented it.”

Another unexpected surprise! This girl is sure to be a great Eternal Rival someday, just like my Eternal Rival Kakashi!

“How Youthful! So young to have invented such a powerful jutsu! What is your name, my most Youthful Konoha Genin?”

She blinks once. Twice. “I’m Noa. But I’m not a genin.”

I smile in apology, striking my Nice Guy Pose. “I am most sorry, young Noa-chan! I was not aware that you had already been promoted to chunin! Most Youthful of y-”

Noa waves her arms around, cutting me off. “Oh no! Sorry Mister Shinobi, but you're mistaken! I’m still an Academy student!”

HOW Youthful-!

“My Eternal Rival!”

I hear my Eternal Rival sigh, but he refuses to slow down or turn and face me - his head still buried in is most-unYouthful novel. How hip and cool Kakashi is when he allows me to demonstrate my
Youth by catching up to him. “Maa, what do you want Gai? We had a challenge just this morning - which I won.”

“My Rival, this is not about our challenges! It is about the Youthful future of Konoha!”

At this he casts me a very hip sideways glance - this is very good! I have caught his attention!

“... And that means ...?”

He’s curious! Oh how great it is that I’ve learned to get him interested after all these years being his Youthful Rival! “The young foreign girl that has most Youthfully been attending the Academy. Did you know she has already invented her own jutsu - one that doesn’t use hand seals?”

That really got his attention. He stops and even closes that most-unYouthful book of his. “She did what?”

“It is quite true, my Rival! She has amazing chakra control, and developed a way to create a blade entirely out of chakra. She created it, Henged it to a more normal appearance, attached a Chakra String, and threw it with impressive aim all in a split second. Without hand signs! She is a most Youthful talent indeed!”

Kakashi taps his chin, and hums in consideration. “If it wasn’t for the new rules in place because of the Massacre, she would have graduated by now with that kind of skill. How are the rest of her abilities? Taijutsu? Genjutsu? Academy Level Ninjutsu?”

“I did not see any other Youthful displays of her chakra control, however her taijutsu is at Academy standards and no more. She has had no extra help because of her relationship with Naruto-kun. It is most unYouthful for a young Konoha blossom with such potential to be neglected in such a way!”

How odd! The blood in my Eternal Rival’s face seems to be draining!

“Gai, I don’t think you shoul-”

“- continue to perpetrate such unYouthful endeavors?” I cut him off, no doubt finishing his exact thought. “I agree! I shall take this young girl under my tutelage and make her a Lotus worthy of Konoha!”

I surely misheard the groan that came from my most hip and cool Rival!
Chapter Summary

Ino is frustrated with how well Noa is doing in the Academy. Noa wants to buy flowers for a grave.

YAMANAKA INO

I hate that stupid Noa girl! What does she have that I don’t?!

When she first transferred in with that weird Naruto kid, I thought it would be great to have another kunoichi in our class - cuz since Sakura’s parents made her drop out I’d been surrounded by boys. And not boys like Sasuke-kun, but boys like Shikamaru and Kiba. They’re lazy and gross and no fun to be around!

Hinata was nice - but really shy and hard to talk to, and the other girls weren’t really even kunoichi. They just cared only about how they looked, not even thinking about training. You can do both, people!

But Noa was different cuz she wanted to learn everything. She was really smart, but was also always asking for help or how something worked and she asked me. We were really good friends for a bit, but then I found out that she spent even more time with Sasuke-kun than I did! And she wasn’t doing anything about it! She didn’t ask him on dates, she didn’t hold his hand, she didn’t even call him ‘Sasuke-kun’!

I decided that I wanted to be her rival, but she didn’t take me seriously!

“I will be your rival, Ino,” She had said. “But not in love. I love Sasuke, but not the same way that you love him. He is my brother - my brother - not some prize to be won. I will become stronger than you, but not over a boy.”

KAMI! Why can she barely even speak the same language as everyone else and still make so much sense?

And that was fine! But then she started getting even better at me in theory because she got Shikamaru wrapped around her little finger. Shikamaru! My childhood friend! He’s too lazy to even pick up a pencil to take a test but he still has time to tutor her!

And then I overheard her talking to Naruto how he would have to make it to the Academy on time in the morning without her because she was getting private taijutsu training with a jounin. I’m in a Clan and I still don’t get that kind of physical training! It’s just so infuriating because she just keeps getting better and at this rate she’s going to take my spot as top kunoichi and I’ll have to take second place!

She’s never going to beat me! Mark my words!
“Noa? What’re you doing in my family’s shop?”

Noa turned around to face me, and I instantly felt annoyed. She never cares about her appearance but she still always looks so good. So exotic. Her skin is really pretty and dark and her eyes are so large. She just randomly throws her hair up into a messy bun every day but it still looks *good* messy and not *sick-just-rolled-out-of-bed* messy.

“Oh! Hi Ino! I forgot that this was the shop that the Yamanaka ran. I was just looking at your … umm … flowers? Is that right?”

I sigh and try to hide my amusement. Noa acts so mature and cool when she’s talking in English but whenever she needs to speak only in the Common language she gets all flustered. “Yes. These plants are flowers. Are you going to buy some? What for?”

She better not be buying them for Sasuke-kun!

I don’t think that Noa caught my veiled threat - that or she just ignored it. “Ah! Yes, I was hoping to buy some flowers to put on a *memorial*. A … grave.”

Oh.

I forgot she was an orphan.

I clear my throat awkwardly, “What kind of flowers? Mums are traditional for funer-”

“Oh! I’m sorry!” Noa cuts me off. “I don’t know much about flowers, and I never really learned flower names. I want a certain kind of flower specifically, but I don’t know the name in Common.”

I frown at this, and think on it. I turn toward the back room behind the register is and call out for some help. “Tou-san! Customer needs you!”

“How my way! Just need to finish filling out this order form!” He calls back.

I turn back to Noa, who looks kind nervous - I guess cuz she doesn’t really like adults. “My Tou-san knows more about foreign flowers than I do. If you haven’t seen it somewhere in the shop yet, I probably don’t know about it.”

Noa must have picked up on some of the bitterness in my voice, because she frowns in apology. “I’m sorry Ino. I didn’t mean to put you in a bad situation.”

I cock my head and look at her sideways, “You know - your Common is actually pretty good. You just have to be more confident in yourself.”

She blushes and is about to respond when I see my Tou-san come out of the back. “Tou-san! This is Noa, she’s in my class at the Academy. She needs some specific flowers to put on a grave, but she doesn’t know any flower names in Common - cuz she’s foreign.”

Tou-san nods, and turns to look at Noa - who stiffens up under his scrutiny and looks like she’s trying to not fidget. Tou-san picks up on that, and he smiles warmly to try to put her at ease.

“Hello Noa-chan,” Tou-san says warmly. “I’ve heard about you from Ino-chan.”

“Ahh … um … hello *Lord* - I mean Yamanaka-sama. You have a beautiful shop.”
Oops. I forgot that Noa was really bad with honorifics.

“There’s no need for that, Noa-chan,” Tou-san assures her. “I heard from Shikamaru’s father that calling me ‘Mis-tah’ is a less formal and more comfortable form of address for you, right?”

He waits for her timid nod and continues. “Then you can go ahead and call me ‘Mis-tah Yamanaka’ if you’d like.”

I see Noa’s shoulders relax at that, and she gives Tou-san a more confident smile. “Thank you Mr. Yamanaka.”

I laugh at the difference between how Tou-san pronounced it and how Noa did - it was comical. But then I scowl when Tou-san reaches over and messes up my hair.

“I worked for almost half an hour on my hair this morning! I just got it tamed!” I complain loudly.

I bat his hand away, and he pretends not to have heard me.

“So what kind of flower were you looking for, Noa-chan? Do you know what it looked like? Where it grew? When?” Tou-san asked while I straightened out my ponytail.

Noa’s eyebrows scrunched up a bit while she thought on it, tugging at the hem of her ratty tunic. “They were my mo - I mean, my kaa-san’s - favorite flower. They’re a family of flowers. I call them ‘lilies’, but I don’t know the Common name for them. They’re big - about this big.” She holds her hands about 20 cm apart (A/N around 7 inches) “from way end to way end.

“I don’t know how many - um - petals! I don’t know how many petals they have, but they’re as long as my finger and as wide as maybe two fingers. A tiger lily has orange petals and little black spots on the inside - towards the middle. But other lilies can come in a bunch of different colors - like pink or white or yellow.”

As she finishes her explanation, she looks self conscious about using so much Common, and looks between Tou-san and I worriedly.

“I’ve never heard of a flower like that,” I say slowly, and I feel bad as I see Noa crumple a little bit. I rush to try and give her some hope, turning to Tou-san. “What about you, Tou-san? Do you know any flowers like that?”

Tou-san takes a moment before he answers. “I grew a flower similar to that here in this shop a couple years back. They’re called ‘daylilies’ and sound just like the ones you’re describing. Tall, on green stalks? Down facing? Bloom soon after the end of winter?”

I see a spark in Noa’s eyes as her smile widens, “Yes! Yes! Do you have any that I can buy from you? I’ll even take just the seeds!”

Tou-san laughs at Noa’s obvious enthusiasm, “We’ll see Noa-chan. We’ll see.”
IBIKI

Chapter Summary

Ibiki laments not being able to properly interrogate Noa. Anko doesn't get her dango.

Underlined - English

MORINO IBIKI

Morino Ibiki had, of course, heard about the foreign and orphaned prodigy - the little speck of a girl that had turned up in the village out of the blue. Everyone in T&I had. The fact that this girl knew an entire language and had an entire culture so vastly different than our own and no one had even heard about it before was infuriating.

The entire T&I department - himself and Yamanaka Inoichi included - were put through their paces because of her - and for good reason. Missing something has huge as a tribe of nomadic people wandering the nations was no light matter. Not to mention that apparently the brat had family living in the village even before the Kyuubi attack.

It was disturbing how little we know about the brat. As shinobi - information could be the difference between life and death. But despite a mandate made by the Hokage for all Konoha shinobi ranked chunin and above to log anything they learned about the foreign kid, the solid data on her was feb and far between.

But Ibiki had read those files. Everyone that the brat interacted with insisted that despite her being from seemingly nowhere and having ties to seemingly nothing - she was fiercely loyal to those who gained her trust.

And the brat’s trust was hard earned. Her criteria seemed to differ - and in ways that were hard to track. One Academy Chunin instructor - Umino Iruka - only needed to treat the Kyuubi brat equally with the rest of the class to be liked by the girl, but despite all of his partner’s - Mizuki’s - best efforts, the girl couldn’t be swayed in his favor. The Nara Heir only helped expand her vocabulary and explain basic Academy concepts for a few days before he had his own English nickname, but Nara Shikaku was hard pressed to get more than a few words out of the girl, thought it was more wariness of high ranking shinobi and the parents of her friends than actual fear or resentment. It took nearly a half a year of daily, one-on-one training for the damned Green Beast to pull her out of her shell - but only after he had apparently wiped her snotty nose after he caught her mourning at the Memorial Stone one morning.

It all was very inconsistent.

But once someone got there - they were there to stay. Her most trusted became part of her orbit - always there or nearby - and some even learned her language: the Nara Heir, the Nine-Tails brat, the Last Uchiha.

And it was those relationships - between her, the Last Uchiha, and the Nine-Tails brat - that drew the most eyes. Everyone had an opinion on the powerful little trio of prodigies.
It was unclear if she knew about Uzumaki’s Jinchuriki status, but she paid no mind to the whispers and the harsh treatment - unless it was to retaliate in the form of pranks or verbal beatdowns. The orphans had only known each other for an hour (according to what the Sandaime had heard from Uzumaki) before the Uzumaki had invited her to live with him. In return the girl trained him day in and day out - using what she learned from the classes he was treated unfairly in to teach him in the way that he learned best. He was slowly becoming a force to be reckoned with - even if his grades weren’t improving.

As for the Uchiha, Sasuke had been friends with the girl before the Massacre. The apparent rivalry that the two boys had seemed to tie into her attention as one of the prizes to be won. (However, the girl made it clear that she found the notion absurd every time it came up.) After Itachi went rogue, Noa was the first person the Last Uchiha had demanded to see that wasn’t already deceased.

Many speculated on why that the three of them had the kind of trust in each other that was comparable to the trust of those who fought together - but Ibiki knew that in a way they had. The villagers were not kind or fair to any of them - not seeing them for who they were outside their labels. Ibiki knew psychological damage. Never being seen for who you were - only what - would mess anyone up.

Yet it was this same trust that many saw as a problem. Noa didn’t seem loyal to the village - only to the people who earned her trust. That they happened to be shinobi of the village was simply coincidence. Despite this, the Hokage was more preoccupied with keeping the Last Uchiha and the Jinchuuriki brats happy than working on gaining the loyalty of the girl. So the Sandaime made it clear to all who interacted with her; we were to earn her trust before asking her any sensitive information, lest she find that Konoha had more people she could distrust rather than trust.

The codebreakers (and basically the entirety of T&I) had objected - they insisted that it was worth the risk. The girl was a fountain of knowledge and possibilities if her language and unique ways of molding chakra were anything to go off of - and the Hokage knew it. At a young age the girl had been assigned both a protective and an investigative ANBU watch with a secondary mission to try and learn her language, but even with careful observations being made when three separate children were learning the words were too foreign and complex to be broken down and understood. If in a non-vital situation the villages best couldn’t crack the language code, then other villages had no hope. Security of courier missions could rise insurmountably.

But the Sandaime had stood strong, so the shinobi of the village - Ibiki himself not included - had taken to attempting to bribe Umino and Maito at every turn in hopes of answers by proxy.

They had yet to succeed.

All Ibiki was doing was walking back to T&I for a graveyard shift when he was stopped suddenly by a bellow. A young, feminine voice cut over wail emanating from the dango shop - oh why was it always the dango shop? “Uhhh … Miss? Are you okay? It’s just dango-”

I narrow my eyes. ’Miss’ was a term that the foreign brat had used to describe young females in the past. If there was a young woman pitching a fit about dango and the girl was there then -

I turn sharply on my heel and beeline straight for the shop.

The sight of a traumatized shop keeper holding a “SOLD OUT” sign standing over the collapsed and very vocal figure of Mitarashi Anko greeted me when I slammed open the door. Standing
awkwardly off to the side, half hidden behind the three or four boxes of dango in her wiry arms, was the girl. She was smaller than I had realised.

Just as she was opening her mouth again in an attempt to calm the tokubetsu jounin, I cut her off.

“Anko,” I snap at her. “You are an adult. Start acting like it. You’re making a scene.”

Nonverbally I stare the kunoichi down. ‘ *Anko I swear to Kami you’ll not get dango for a year if you scare off the girl now.*’

Immediately she goes silent, contorting her torso and head to face me despite not fully moving from her awkward collapsed position. She immediately starts pouting at a deadly level, skillfully ignoring my silent warning.

“*Iiiiiiiibiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii ! They’re out of daaaaaaamaaangooooooowoooooowoooooo !*”

I feel my eye twitch, and have to fight the urge to facepalm. “Anko. You ate here for breakfast. And lunch. And as and afternoon snack. You’ve had enough dango.”

The snake summoner looked offended, “You can never have enough dango!”

While Anko was distracted, the girl had crept behind me to the door, boxes still in hand. Just as she began to inch open the door - looking like she was just looking for an opening to throw it open and sprint for the trees and

*BANG*!

Anko jumped up and was suddenly there, using a single arm to slam the door shut.

“And just where do you think you’re going?” Anko practically purred, right up in the girl’s face. Anko was not very tall for a woman - only 167 cm ( *A/N Nearly 5’6’* ) - but the little foreign girl couldn’t be even 145 cm ( *A/N About 4’9’* ), coming up barely past my waist even as she stood ramrod straight.

“*Sorry!*” The girl yelped on reflex. “I’m sorry! I came late on purpose, hoping that no one else would want dango after I came. But I already bought them, and I think Mr. Shop Keeper was closing up - so can I leave now? I promised Sasuke and Ruto that I would bring home enough dango to last all week!”

Anko eyes narrowed, and I could see the gears turning in her head. The girl may have been technically in the right in this situation, but Anko was never reasonable - especially when it came to dango. But Anko also knew that alienating Noa early on would make her life - as a member of T&I especially - more difficult later.

Kami help me. I knew that look in her eyes. She was going to do something reckless, and I was going to have to clean up her mess afterwards.

“Well then little bird, why don’t we make a deal?” Anko chirped with fake cheer, “I’ll let you leave here with all of your dango but only if you can make a better design than I can. Ibiki’ll judge.”

Cue overly dramatic, menacing smile aimed at me - daring me to protest. I sigh again. I swear she gets worse every time I see her.

“Design? I know that word - but what do you mean?” the girl asks hesitantly.
Anko simply smiles like a serpent and drags the girl out back, gesturing to the small forest of murals. Anko always did have a talent for throwing simple dango sticks at tree trunks to make rather impressive designs.

“Oh,” the girl looked on - impressed. “That kind of design,”

I give Anko a feral grin, “Beaten at your own game?”

Anko only groans as I examine the well detailed rendition of Anko’s figure - perfectly to scale with fine details like her hitai-ate’s Leaf and her mesh top.

“Good job brat. This beats a lotus any day,” I compliment her grudgingly.

I see the little brat smile, and then pick up her boxes. “Thank you for the competition! I like dango a lot! So I guess I’ll see you around? I’m always up for a rematch!”

As the smug little twerp skips away, I turn and lock eyes with Anko.

Maybe earning the brat’s trust was easier than we thought.
HIRUZEN

Chapter Summary

The Sandiame has to decide teams. The council tries to get in the way.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is lighter on plot and heavier on reasoning. I wrote this chapter after I complied a separate document reasoning out whether it was actually logical to put Noa on Team 7. I didn't want to just say "hey. Sakura ain't here no more. BETTER REPLACE HER."

Thanks again for reading!

Lots of Love!
-MiloOfTheKey

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Underlined - English

SARUTOBI HIRUZEN

He was getting too old for this.

He already retired - honestly, he had. But all the same, after Minato died -

No. Don’t go there, Hiruzen.

I lit my pipe, allowing the strong odor of tobacco to fill the office. I massage my temples gingerly, staring at the pile of files in front of me. Newly minted genin files.

Being the Hokage was satisfying in many ways - and usually deciding new genin teams was one of them. It was satisfying to work to cultivate and nurture the next generation, a deep seated satisfaction, really. But not now: not with the Foreigner, the Nine-Tails Jinchuuriki, and the Last Uchiha all in one graduating class.

The council (no doubt orchestrated by Danzo) wanted to spread around the Foreigner’s trust to as many people as was possible without her catching on. The problem was that it was clear she already had, caught on that is. The girl was slowly becoming alienated simply because we wanted her to trust us. She needed stability and familiarity before she could really connect with anyone new, but the council refused to hear it.

But ultimately, the decision came down to him, and although displeasing the council may make major decisions more difficult later on it might be best in the long run overall. Kami, why did he ever get involved in politics?
Breaking down abilities and potential teams was like one big logic puzzle. You wanted the best result while also taking in as much factors into consideration as possible:

The Genin:

**ABURAME SHINO** was the second ranked boy in the Academy - and just above average all around. His bugs and clan jutsu gave him limited additional offensive abilities, but he had potential for an *INFO GATHERER* or *SCOUT* or *TRACKER*.

**AKIMICHI CHOUJI** average all around, but had his clan jutsu and physical prowess to fall back on. *TAIJUTSU SPECIALIST*.

**INUZUKA KIBA** had above average physical abilities - not fantastic, but with potential to be formidable. Plus both Inuzuka traits and his companion to enhance his tracking abilities. *TAIJUTSU SPECIALIST* or *SCOUT* or *TRACKER*.

**UCHIHA SASUKE** was the top of his class - rookie of the year. He was well rounded all around, although with some difficulties performing genjutsu without the aid of a Sharingan. Impressive offensive ninjutsu abilities. *NINJUTSU* or *GENJUTSU SPECIALIST*.

**NARA SHIKAMARU** was ranked only above the grossly discriminated against Naruto in the Academy. However, he was the Nara Clan Heir and had demonstrated his ability to pick up any information - even English - very quickly. He was best at ninjutsu overall, but not overly impressive. *INFO PROCESSING* or *NINJUTSU SPECIALIST*.

**HYUUGA HINATA** was above average across the board. She had her clan taijutsu and Bakugan to augment her abilities - although she wasn’t overly impressive with either. *TRACKER* or *SCOUT* or *TAIJUTSU SPECIALIST*.

**YAMANAKA INO** seems to have baseline fine enough chakra control to learn medical ninjutsu - and had expressed interest in it in the past. She is above average at ninjutsu, and as a Yamanaka, she had her knowledge on human psychology and her clan jutsu. *FIELD MEDIC* or *T&I SPECIALIST* or *INФILTRATION SPECIALIST* or *NINJUTSU SPECIALIST*.

**UZUMAKI NARUTO** was the “dead last” in his class, although most of that was the discrimination against him, not because of his gross lack of ability. An offensive person, which became furthered by his newly learned Shadow Clones. Originally however, Shadow Clones were used for infiltration and reconnaissance.

His skill with ninjutsu in the Academy was dismal - but his demonstration last night in the forest implies that it was the little things that he had trouble with - not the big ones. Which made sense, with his chakra stores augmented both by his heritage as an Uzumaki and because of his hosting of the Kyuubi. So he could be an *INFO GATHERER* or *SCOUT* or *NINJUTSU SPECIALIST*.

**NOA** has her own unique way of molding chakra that no one had ever seen before - allowing her to create whatever she wanted to in an instant. She demonstrates this ability predominantly in weapons, but her instructors has seen her make decks of playing cards, toys, paper, and various other trinkets - even an entire completed set of shogi. With that kind of control, it would be highly beneficial if she was trained as the primary field medic in her rookie year. That same creativity and
control would make her a great at genjutsu as well. She was also privately tutored by Maito Gai in Taijutsu.

The foreign girl’s unique language gives her much potential as an extremely secure messenger. To their knowledge, all of the girl’s nomadic relatives had died in the Kyuubi attack or soon after. Therefore, English would be a very secure channel. Not only that, but she can defend herself easily and has demonstrated her ability while doing pranks to throw on a Henge and disappear into a crowd - COURIER or INFRINGEMENT SPECIALIST or INFO GATHERER or TAIJUTSU SPECIALIST or FIELD MEDIC.

Compiled, that was:


FIELD MEDICS: Noa, Ino

Field medics couldn’t logically be put on the same team as another unless there was a surplus. There’s no reason to have two medics on one team and none on another.

Preexisting relationships couldn’t be ignored, either. There was the tradition of Ino-Shika-Cho, and the three had been training together since birth. However, Noa and Shikamaru had proven that they were constantly on the same brainwave if the reports from the Academy were anything to go off of.

Most prominently, though, were the relationships between Naruto, Sasuke, and Noa. If he broke the three of them up completely, then the village may very well lose all of Noa’s trust - alienating both her, and Naruto and Sasuke - who’s most prominent ties were to her.

Then there were the jounin-sensei. The only one’s available were Hatake Kakashi, Sarutobi Asuma, and Yuhi Kurenai. They came with their own problems and criteria.

Kakashi had to be the one training Sasuke, in order to help the Uchiha develop his Sharingan. And by putting Kiba with Kakashi, Kiba would also be able to develop further his enhanced senses. However putting Kakashi and the Nara on the same team would compound the laziness.

Hinata needed a strong feminine influence in her life, and Kurenai may just be able to provide that for her. But there was the chance that Kurenai would clash with Ino severely if Ino was on her squad.

Asuma’s leadership and strategic abilities would help him get in the good graces of both Noa and Shikamaru. However, his unflappable demeanor may compound with Shino’s to create a low energy - although very analytical - team.

He really was getting too old for this.
It took him two hours and a lot of paper pushing to narrow it all down to two possible team combinations. One that the council would like, and one that he thought would benefit the most people.

Kami, why did he ever get into politics?

For the council:

w/Kakashi - OFFENSIVE TEAM: CHOUJI - KIBA - SASUKE

Weaknesses - no singularly defined ninjutsu expert. Sasuke is separated from both of his closest friends/rivals.

Strengths: Sasuke and Kiba are both with Kakashi.

w/Kurenai - SCOUT TEAM: NARUTO - SHINO - HINATA

Weaknesses - the Hyuuga Heiress has obvious feelings for Naruto, and that could be detrimental. Also: Naruto on a team away from his close friends.

Strengths: Hinata is with Kurenai. Shadow Clones, Aburame bugs, and Bakugan all create highly effective scouting/infiltration team.

w/Asuma - INFILTRATION/INFO PROCESSING w/2 MEDICS: NOA - INO - SHIKAMARU

Weaknesses - Shikamaru and Noa knew English - but would be hard pressed to trust enough to teach others, especially if they felt forced. Also, there would be two medics one one team.

Strengths - Shikamaru and Noa are both highly familiar with each other, and so are Shikamaru and Ino. Plus, Ino has a kind of loose rivalry going with Noa. Noa is in a familiar team environment in a way, and has the potential to quickly come to liking Asuma.

However, as he would prefer:

w/Kakashi: OFFENSIVE TEAM w/MEDIC: SASUKE - NARUTO - NOA

Weaknesses - Sasuke and Naruto’s rivalry. Plus, little opportunity for Noa to meet and connect with new people. However, Kiba wouldn't have a chance to work on his tracking with Kakashi. No defined taijutsu expert.

Strengths - Kakashi values teamwork above all else - and that’s exactly what those three embody. Plus, with three of them knowledgeable in English, they could communicate effectively in the field.

w/Kurenai: TRACKING AND SCOUTING TEAM: HINATA - KIBA - SHINO

Weaknesses - Kiba misses out on the chance to train with another person with enhanced senses.

Strengths - Hinata has Kurenai to pull her out of her shell and boost her confidence. Plus the
Aburame bugs, Bakugan, and Inuzuka traits would be an effective tracking, scouting, and mediocre offensive unit.

w/Asuma: INFO PROCESSING AND FIELD WORK w/MEDIC: INO - SHIKAMARU - CHOJI

Weaknesses - Noa doesn’t have a chance to interact often with either Asuma or Shikamaru.

Strengths: Ino-Shika-Cho tradition maintained, and only one medic. Shikamaru has a chance to meet Asuma and interact with him often.

Those old hags on the council could gripe all they wanted. He was getting his way with this this time.

Kakashi better be ready for the new Team 7. They were going to be quite the handful.

Chapter End Notes

This story is also on Fanfiction.net and Quotev, if anyone prefers those sites over this one!

Lots of Love!
-MiloOfTheKey
Chapter Summary

Naruto doesn't want to get out of bed. Team assignments are going ... interestingly.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is the first to include widespread "mixing" dialogue - where characters are switching back and forth within a sentence between languages. Please note that all spoken English words are underlined - but I wasn't as precise with thought English words.

If I want to make a clear distinguished that "Naruto only knows that word in English - not Common" then I underlined it. The same goes for nicknames that are English words.

I hope you can follow my writing! Thanks for reading!

-MiloOfTheKey

Underlined - English

UZUMAKI NARUTO

~~~~~~

“RUTO! Get your ass down here before I kick it into next week !”

Whhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhy does Nee-chan have to be so loooooooooooooooooooooound?? I know I should get up but my sheets are so warm and the floor looks so cold...

Minutes pass, and I hear the sound of footsteps in the hall. Nee-chan better not be coming at me with a frying pan again! I turn my back to the door, trying to block her out.

“Hey Dobe. You better listen to her. Noa might even let you live if you get up soon.”

I pop off my pillow, tumbling off my futon. “Teme?” I rub the sleep out of my eyes and glare up at his damned smug mug. He had a damn tomato in one hand and was holding open the door with the other. “ Why are you even here ? This is my house!”

“ This is my compound, Useless. ” He snarks. “I technically own this house.”

I groan, “ Semantics .”

“Big word, Dobe.” Sasuke quips, too cheerful for this blasted hour of day. “ Anyway, rise and shine . Team assignments are today.”
"WHAT?"

~~~

"Ruto, you’re bouncing off the walls."

"NO I’M NOT!" I shriek at Nee-chan. And I’m not! I mean, I did feel really hyper during the walk to the Academy, but she didn’t have to say it!

I turn to look at Nee-chan, and I see that she’s just teasing - she’s got her ‘I think I know the deal’ face on. And that face means she has a hunch. And when Nee-chan has a hunch, she’s usually right.

“Seriously though, Ruto. You’re fine. We’re fine. Team assignments don’t mean that we’ll never see each other again.” She smiles at me, and reaches over to tug at a lock of my hair. Nee-chan’s always doing stuff like that - smiling and joking and giving out physical affection. I didn’t realise how much I was missing out on in a family until she came along - BEST SISTER EVER!

“Thanks, Sis. Don’t worry, we’re gonna be together! You, me, and the Bastard! We’re gonna be the best team EVER!!"

“Yes, we are. Just like you’re becoming Hokage and Sasuke is gonna be ANBU captain. I hope you both have room for me in your new Administration!”

“Believe it - dattebayo!”

~~~

“Noa, if we don’t find some way to entertain the Dobe soon he really will bounce off the walls.”

“Hey! - ‘ttebayo!” I protest. “I’m not nervous!"

The Teme just raises an eyebrow, “Who said anything about nervous?”

I hear Nee-chan sigh, and I turn to see her rubbing her temples. “Boys… Fine, I’ll waste chakra on you guys - how about another rematch of Chicken Foot? Gimme a sec to whip up some Dominos….”

“YES! CHICKEN FOOT!”

~~~

“Dobe, a jounin isn’t going to fall for a cheap trick like that.”

I jump off the chair, examining my work. That eraser was old! It was just covered in chalk dust!

“Hey Nee-chan! Why’re you laughing? Something funny?”

Our jounin-sensei actually fell for the eraser-in-the-door trick! “Ha HA! IT WORKED! You fell for it! YOU FELL FOR IT!”

Nee-chan was giggling so hard she looked like she was going to fall out of her chair! Even the
Teme looked amused! Totally. Worth. It.

As Noa kept laughing, I kept my ‘disarming grin’ - as Nee-chan calls it - on while I take a sec to examine our sensei. He doesn’t really look like much, but I know that you don’t have to look dangerous to be dangerous - I mean just look at Nee-chan!

Our sensei just kinda seems ... odd. He was dressed in jounin standard, but his lower face was completely covered by some skin tight mask. With his hitai-ate pulled down across his right eye, all you could really tell about him was that he has really crazy silver-grey hair and grey eyes - or was it eye?

There was something familiar about him too ... 

“Maaa. How can I say this? My first impression is ... I don’t like you guys.”

Well that was uplifting.

“Well our first impression of you is that you fall for lame pranks!” Nee-chan shot back. “You must be he’s Dog. We’re going to be learning from you!”

It takes me a sec to process what Nee-chan was saying. But then I got it! He had the same chakra feeling as ANBU Dog did! We had data on him from when he was on my guard!

Dog still looked unimpressed. He looked at us, boredly, and ordered us dryly, “Meet me on the roof.”

And then he disappeared in a flurry of leaves.

As soon as he was gone, I heard Nee-chan mutter behind me. “Man have I got to learn to Sushin.”

~~~

“Well. Let’s begin with introducing yourselves.”

I glance - confused - at Sasuke and Nee-chan. The Teme looks as inscrutable as ever, but I narrow my eyes at Nee-chan. She’s got her ‘I know and you don’t’ face on, and she looks really excited. She’s practically vibrating in her seat.

“Like what?” She asks too innocently - well, Sasuke and I know that’s it’s too innocent, but only cuz we know her. Dog wasn’t on her rotation, only mine, so he doesn’t know her well enough to tell. Probably.

Dog seems to think for a sec, “How about your likes, dislikes … dreams and things like that…?”

“OH!” Noa exclaims. “I’ll go first!”

Sasuke and I exchange a look. Noa hates talking about herself - especially in front of strangers. She’s got something planned.

“Maa maa little girl. Go ahead.” Dog drawls. Oh man, Dog was gonna get it from Nee-chan for that ‘little girl’ comment! Noa hates being treated like a kid.

POOF!

Suddenly, a very similar copy of Dog is sat right where Noa once was - the only difference was that ‘Dog’ had a bright red cartoonish clown smile on the fabric of his mask.
“Ohaiyo!” Fake-Dog exclaimed with energy, waving cheerily at Real-Dog. I start laughing, but fight to stomp down on my snorts.

“The name’s Hatake Kakashi! I’m a jounin of Konohagakure, and I’m really excited to be here and to meet all of you guys! I like reading books in public - even if they’re contents are a bit questionable - but hey, don’t knock it!” Fake-Dog waggles his finger at us. “My dislikes are showing up on time - or really any reasonable time frame at all - cuz I like to make people late! My dreams are private - cuz I don’t like talking about myself that much - but I do hope to one day beat Konoha’s great Green Beast in even one of our challenges! I’m his Eternal Rival, you know~!” Fake-Dog finishes earnestly.

One second. Two.

The Bastard snorts once, and I break down laughing.

Nee-chan releases her trick and smiles sugar-sweetly at our sensei. “It’s very nice to meet you, Mr. Hatake, sir!”
I was unsure why I was surprised that Noa pulled something as moronic as Henge-ing into our sensei. I was also curious how much of what she said was true - I know that both she and the Dobe had been around ANBU guards when they were younger, and had used their abilities as sensors to pinpoint which guard was which and could do what.

They mostly used the data for their pranks - but I know that Noa also used the data to figure out whether she could trust someone she met for the first time. If they were an ANBU - not as trustworthy. But if they were an ANBU that was protective of Naruto? They made her short list.

One day - out of curiosity - Sasuke had looked over those notes (after he got better at reading in English); According to what he read - if he remembered correctly - Dog was deemed potentially trustworthy because the number of attacks on Naruto reduced significantly when he was on duty, and he left little ‘goodies’ for Naruto - like a sleep hat and ramen coupons. He was really skilled too, and going off what they figured out about Naruto sensing abilities he had a primary lightning affinity.

He - their sensei - was looking at Noa’s fixed smile blankly, but Sasuke thought he saw a glint of something in the jounin’s singular eye. Was he suspicious? Impressed? Angry? Calculating? I couldn’t tell.

After a tense moment of silence - just after Naruto had started to feel the tense atmosphere and finally stopped laughing - Kakashi-sensei gave Noa a single eye smile-thing that looked like a wink … kinda.

“Maa maa Chibi-chan, glad to see you had enough skill in the Henge to pass graduate from the Academy. But I think you got my hair wrong - it’s longer than that was, you see.” He told her with pseudo-enerstness, dripping fake helpfulness like a waterfall.

Naruto and I exchange a look - was this guy crazy?

“Oh! Oops!” Noa exclaimed with fake apology. She was playing along, apparently, and she replaced her sweet smile with an exaggerated pout. “And don’t call me Chibi-chan!”

Kakashi-sensei gave Noa another eye smile, “Then why don’t you give me another name that I should call you by?”

That wasn’t subtle, sensei. Seriously?
“Okay then Kakashi-sensei.” Noa drops the act, shrugging, “I’m Noa. Orphan. Let’s see … likes? I like hanging out with Ruto, cooking with Sasuke, and playing chess and shogi with Stag. I dislike those who are cruel without reason and I can’t stand it when people waste anything - time, food, opportunities - anything like that. I also hate formalities - honorifics are just stupid to me. My dreams? I don’t really have one thing alone that I aspire for, but I have lots of short term goals that lead up to what I want to achieve.”

I give a slight “Hn” in acknowledgement to the silent message that Noa was giving Naruto and I. ‘I trust this guy. Enough to say a lot and the truth.’

Naruto picks up on it too, and he makes a slight fist and knocks his hand twice against thin air - to say that he heard and was acknowledging what she said.

The silver haired jounin nods once, and then turns to Naruto. “Right. You next, blondie.”

Naruto pouts at the nickname, and maturely sticks his tongue out at Kakashi. “I’m Uzumaki Naruto - ttebayo! I like ramen, Nee-chan, Iruka-sensei, and sparing with the Teme! I dislike people who mess with my precious people and the vegetables Nee-chan makes me eat” - he glares at Noa - “My dream is to become Hokage so I can protect all of my precious people and everyone will finally acknowledge me!”

I smirk slightly at the Dobe. He said a lot, but nothing too close to the chest - he was smarter than he let on. I may call him Dobe (A/N “dead-last”) but only as a joke. If teachers other than Iruka-sensei weren’t so harsh on him, he would’ve beaten the Aburame to third place overall - only after me and Noa.

Noa reaches over and pokes my side, just above where she knew I was ticklish. I glare at her, and she giggles. “Your turn, Sasuke!”

“Hn.”

“That’s not a respoooooooonse!” Noa sang out.

I roll my eyes at her again, before turning to fact our new sensei. “Uchiha Sasuke. I like tomatoes, sparring with the Dobe, and cooking with Noa. I dislike traitors and blind revenge. My dream is to live my best life and serve my village well.”

I feel Noa’s eyes on me as I finish, and I’m left with a kind of glow in my chest knowing that I made her happy. I was going to be a senseless avenger until she beat some sense into me, after all. I still remember her words from that day. The day I had told her that I needed only to focus on revenge - nothing else.

“Don’t give me that bullshit, Sasuke. Revenge isn’t what you want.”

I had objected - insisting that I really did want revenge, and then she rounded on me - slapped me square across the face, looked me dead in the eyes, and told me to get my head out of my ass.

“There’s a saying that my people had, ‘When seeking revenge, dig two graves.’
I know that it hurts, Sasuke. Believe me, I do. But revenge won’t make that hurt go away. That burning feeling in your gut and the kunai in your heart and the itch at the back of your neck won’t just disappear if you dive headfirst into some blind rage of revenge! You want it to - you think it will - but hate only brings more hate. It’s a cycle, Sasuke. Destruction will only make all the horrible feelings worse.

“Revenge destroys any true - any good - emotion you have and leaves only anger and hate and spite and rage. If you go down that path you’ll never really come back from it. Are you prepared for that? Are you prepared to never be happy again? Is that what you want?

“You say you want to beat Itachi? To be better than him? Then prove it. Become strong for the sake of everything he destroyed. I will help you become the man that Itachi could never be. I’m here for you - and I always will be.

“Itachi crippled this village - so make it strong. Itachi killed your family - so build a new one. Itachi made you miserable - so spend your life doing things that will make you happy.

“‘The best revenge is living well,’ Sasuke. Remember that.”

And I did remember that. I lived by that.

It was hard at first - every day that I woke up and Kaa-san wasn’t there and the clan compound was empty made him furious all over again. But Noa was always there - she always talked him down and distracted him. She made him part of her family with Naruto. The two of them taught him English - taught him their games and their codes. Naruto pulled him into his pranks and Noa dragged him out shopping for groceries and weapons.

They gave him his life back, his family back.

So he trained so he could protect them.

~~~

“...Oh and skip breakfast. You might throw up.”

And with that - Kakashi-sensei Sushin-ed away.

Naruto looked distraught, “Survival training? SERIOUSLY?”

Noa and I locked eyes, and I saw her holding in a laugh. Wait - I knew that look. I level a glare at her, “You know something, don’t you?”

Naruto shuts up at that, and turns to level his own glare at her too. Noa gave us one of her more feral grins, “Well if I told you - you would never learn!”

Naruto huffed at that, and I squint at her. “What does that mean?”

She rolls her eyes, “C’mon guys. Think. What did he say?”

“He said we had survival training to test whether we could officially become genin or go back to the Academy.” I state slowly, trying to figure out what she meant.
Noa smiles, “And....?”

“He said that he was our opponent, that 66% of people failed, and that we could use all of our
shinobi tools.” Naruto followed up, rapid fire.

I recall his closing remarks. “We’re to meet him at training ground 7 - that’s the one with the
bridge near the memorial stone - and to not be late. Or eat breakfast because we’d just bring it back
up.”

Noa smiles widely, and I know we were on the right track. “Shinobi look underneath the
underneath, right? So why would he say any of that extra stuff? All he really needed to say was
‘Meet at training ground 7 for your final evaluation. If you fail you need more training. The test
will be against me.’ But he said more.”

“The extra stuff he said was survival training, all shinobi tools, don’t be late, and don’t eat
breakfast.” I summarize.

“Or we’d puke,” Naruto added helpfully.

I think on this all - head in hands - until I look up the two of them, “Why would we not eat
breakfast? Even if we vomit, we still need the energy to perform well. Vomiting is better than
crashing halfway through.”

Naruto looks confused, “I thought shinobi were always supposed to listen to their superiors?”

“But!” Noa cuts in, “We’re still technically civilians! We may have the hiate-ate, but we don’t
have the title!”

Naruto grins, loving the loop holes. “So we eat! Any objections?”

“Nope!”

“Hn.” I allow.

“That’s an ‘Aye’ from Sasuke!” Noa helpfully - although unnecessarily - translates.

I would say something snarky, but I’m still thinking on the other instructions. “The comment he
made about not being late probably doesn’t need to be overanalyzed. Even if he ends up as late as
today - we have Noa to make stuff -”

“Hey!” She objects, “What am I? A toy factory?”

I plow on, ignoring her. “- He said survival training. And all shinobi tools. That means that we
should prepare for any circumstances that we may come across - using whatever we can.”

The two of them seem to think on this, before Naruto pipes in, “He said Ground 7, right? It’s -” He
glances up “- roughly three hours till sundown and we should get at least six hours of sleep. So
that’s six hours to check out the grounds and try and figure out how to best prepare for tomorrow.”

Noa looks excited. “Does that mean laying traps?”


I groan, but stand and dust myself off anyway. “You two will be the death of me,” I grumble.
KAKASHI - PART 1

Chapter Summary

Kakashi was reluctantly impressed with his - potential - genin team. The bell test was going to be ... interesting.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

HATAKE KAKASHI - PART ONE

Kakashi was reluctantly impressed with his - potential - genin team.

He was mature enough to admit to himself that the thought of teaching anyone - especially his dead sensei’s son - made him want to defect to Kumo. He was also mature enough to admit to himself that Minato-sensei would’ve wanted Kakashi to know his son as well as he could.

So he was stuck.

When he first had looked over the files of the rookies he was getting he was surprised despite himself. He knew that he was likely to get Naruto on his team and that he was pretty much guaranteed the Uchiha because of Obito, but he hadn’t actually expected to get both of them and their little foreign love interest. (He had seen the three of them going around the village - he had his suspicions.)

As an elite jounin, he knew more than most about the protocol in regards to little Noa: ‘If you meet her - treat her as you would anyone else, only better. Try to gain her trust.’

(Kakashi also knew that that was utter bullshit and that the two criteria were complete oxymorons for most shinobi in the village. Konoha was better than many villages, but most powerful shinobi treated those without genkai kekkei or clan techniques to back them up as insignificant.)

Up until that day, Kakashi had never actually met the girl face to face. He was reluctantly impressed with her. When he had showed up, she had immediately found an excuse to say something in English that didn’t sound like the insult it had held place for. Based off what he had heard during his guard duty, it was more likely that he had used some kind of code to identify him; furthermore most likely based off his chakra signature. He had held suspicions for some time that the girl was a sensor-type, but never had any real confirmation.

When she had pulled that stunt with the Henge, he was even more impressed. Noa may not be a primarily, or even comfortably, a T&I type shinobi but she was good at processing information and manipulating an atmosphere. She used his appearance and what she most likely had heard around
the village (or from Gai) to figure out his identity. Using the information she had she made a joke to alleviate the stress that her teammates were under, while also giving Kakashi a subtle warning not to underestimate her. She was good.

The statement she made about herself weren’t any different than the reports they had on her indicated, though Kakashi had a suspicion that a message had somehow passed between her and her two teammates through her little speech (although he was unsure exactly what).

Naruto acted more like Kushina-nee than Minato-sensei but had both of his parent’s drive to earn the mantle of Hokage. Kakashi had the suspicion that Naruto was smarter than he was letting on, but wasn’t worried. Everyone had masks (some just more literally than others).

Uchiha Sasuke’s rather short introduction had actually impressed him the most. He was expecting a rage driven Avenger but instead had found a level headed, introverted youth who wanted to live happily to defy his brother. That kind of attitude lessened the worry in his chest, and made him just a bit more willing to take on this group of rookies.

When he had Sushin-ed away for the second time, he came back a second later on a side ledge, chakra concealed like the ANBU captain he once was. He expected them all to part ways, but Noa again surprised him by identifying the hints within his instructions.

‘That one’s sharp. And she’s not flaunting it - she’s using it to further her friends.’

After they made their conclusion to both eat breakfast and check out Ground 7, Kakashi felt something lift in his chest.

‘This is better than I could’ve hoped for. Although, I may have to change the test - just a bit...’

“YOU’RE LATE!” Naruto jumped up and shouted the moment that I Sushin-ed into the clearing. When he moved up, he disturbed some kind of card game the three of them were playing, causing Sasuke to scowl and Noa to roll her eyes in irritation.

“Ruto! I’m not in the mood for 52 Card Pickup!” Noa scolded him, and before my eyes whipped out a couple dozen chakra strings and started pulling all the playing cards into her open palm.

‘Impressive control. She should look into being a medic.’

“Hn.” Sasuke agreed lowly.

There was a pause, one that included a lot of glaring, before suddenly Noa started laughing uncontrollably.

“What? What’s so funny?” Naruto asked, bounding up to his team - my arrival already forgotten.

Noa caught her breath and gestured towards where I was standing back and observing the team dynamic. “He’s got it so bad!” She choked out, “He has to learn basic English AND how to speak Uchiha!”

Great. Now they were all laughing.

Well more accurately Sasuke looked amused, which really was an Uchiha’s version of side
gripping laughter.

I, none too quietly, slam an alarm clock onto a low stump and effectively shut them up.

‘ There. That’s better. ’

“Now then. It’s set for noon.”

I hold up the single bell I had, “Here is your objective. Your task is to take it from me before your time’s up. If you succeed, you three become my new genin team. And if you fail…”

I stand up to my full height and loom over them, radiating KI. “If you fail to take the bell from me - Chibi-chan here loses her immunity here in Konoha.”

The silence was deafening.

Surprisingly, it was Sasuke who broke the silence. “You can’t do that,” He insists with poorly concealed rage.

“Noa is a citizen of Konohagakure!” Naruto chimes in loudly before -

“ Boys! ”

Silence and all eyes on her. Noa spoke evenly in the eerily quiet training ground. “I never received formal citizenship, Naruto. I don’t even know if I was even born here. So technically, yes, Kakashi has the right to revoke my green card.”

“But Nee-chan-” Naruto cuts in again, trying to object. But Noa wasn’t having it.

“- NO. Ruto! I don’t belong here the same way that you and Sasuke do!” Her voice quivers - just slightly - but she pushes on. “But I want to! And I will fight for it! So take all that damn energy you’re putting towards complaining and work together with me so I can stay.”

I was impressed with how levelheaded she was - considering the circumstances. ‘ Naruto may be the heart of the team, and Sasuke the mind - but there’s no doubt in my mind that Noa is the driving force behind it all. Guiding but never pushing - she’s like a boulder directing the flow of a river.’

As I watched, the two boys visibly collected themselves. As I turn to blend into the trees Sasuke’s voice stops me.

“Wait.”

I turned back to him, wondering what this was about. The Rookie of the Year spoke in a calm, firm voice. “If we get the bell will you guarantee Noa’s official citizenship?”

I met the Uchiha’s determined gaze with a level stare.

“Yes. If you get the bell.”

~~~

“ Storm Warning! ”

I look up from my copy of Icha Icha Paradise at the sound of the English command. I was unfamiliar with the term and the words within it.
I was on his guard when (by his count) 52 Naruto clones burst into the clearing he was lounging in. As they started converging in on him, he noticed that each clone had a single playing card somewhere on their person - foreheads, arms, chests, backs. A full deck.

Somewhere in the mob, a Naruto yelled out an English command, “Head - Black.”

Immediately a group of clones broke off and started to engage Kakashi. As they began to pop, the other clones were observing carefully and skirting out of the crossfire.

‘He’s testing my level of ability. Using disposable clones as to limit his personal injuries. Good...’

“The shift of coordinated movement after the call of commands was impressive; no doubt that the commands were tied into the cards that each clone was wearing. The clone knew his card and followed commands based off that. It minimized confusion and made calling orders efficiently.

However, and inevitably, all the close combat clones were expelled and the supporting soon followed. Kakashi was left alone in a clearing littered with playing cards.

Playing cards…

Suddenly there was a storm of cards whipped by some invisible wind. Slipping into a defensive stance, I scanned the area for Noa. No one else could’ve orchestrated such a feat.

A moment later, she and two Naruto clones (how much chakra did that kid have?) dropped from a nearby tree. She raised her hands like a conductor and her fingers twitched, compelling the cards to circle closer and closer to Kakashi himself.

As the cards neared him, they began to shift. They turned sapphire blue and began to morph, latching onto each other until they had formed a single circling chain that began to descend on me from all angles in a sphere of chakra. The chains tightened until I was effectively trapped, hands bound and the chain’s ends attached to rocks and trees.

‘...Impressive...’

“Assume he can get out.”

I examined the chains, ‘Oh - I can get out.’

The sound of shattering chains echoes throughout all of Konoha.

Chapter End Notes

When I wrote this chapter, it ended up twice as long as a normal one! Oops!

But I don't want to deprive you all with only one point of view, so I'll tell you what! You get half of this chapter today and a handful of Omake - then you get the second half tomorrow. Deal? Yes? No? Too bad, sorry! I'm the Author! THIS ISN'T A DEMOCRACY!
Lots of Love
-Milo Of The Key
Chapter Summary

Gai interrupts Noa's restful sleep. Tenten doesn't know what to think of her new genin team.

Chapter Notes

I promised that I would post a handful of Omake later today as an apology for not posting the full KAKASHI chapter.

However, Karma - a reader - left a comment expressing how frustrated they were with the cliffhanger. SO YOU ALL GET THE OMAKE NOW!

I bounced around the idea of how Gai would react when he realized that each time he startled Noa - she was actually swearing like a sailor. And so this chapter was born!

ENJOY!
-Milo Of The Key

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

OMAKE - Gai Learns Just How Much Noa Swears

NOA

“ Fucking goddamn bullshit! BURN IN THE FIREY PITS OF HELL O’YE DEMONS SPAWN FROM TARTARUS! I DO BANISH THE - YE GREEN ANTICHRI ST SIRED OF SATAN!! FUCK OFF!.”

“Noa-hasu! It is most Youthful to exclaim such a wonderful greeting to me on such a beautiful day! Why is it that you seem angered - when the sun is up and the Youthful birds are chirping?”

I level my best death-glare at Gai and get out of bed, whipping two or three chakra-senbon at his head. “The sun isn’t even up yet, you psychopathic Green Beast! Even the earliest birds are still sleeping! What do you want at this ungodly hour?”
Just as the demonic Beast with his damn genjutsu rainbows was about to answer, there was a hesitant knock at my door. I glare again at Gai - who stands there like the towering, green picture of innocence he so is not - and go to answer it.

Sasuke was there - kunai in hand - looking like he had just rolled out of bed and straight into a war zone. “Are you okay? What’s going on?”

I raise my hand to stop the stream of questions, and rub the gunk out of my eyes. “I’m sorry for worrying you, Sasuke. Naruto is used to Gai dropping by, but I forgot you’ve never met - probably because I thought I he kicked this goddamn habit already. I was just rudely -” I glared back at Gai, who looked at the Uchiha in my hallway with poorly hidden curiosity “- awakened by my teacher, Gai. He was just leaving, weren’t you Gai?”

“Oh course not, my most Youthful Konoha Lotus! I have a need for your assistance!” Gai exclaimed indignantly.

Sasuke looks disbelieving, and glances over my shoulder at the Green Beast. “Your sensei? You cuss that much and banish demons because of your sensei?”

I freeze, and I feel the build up of something dangerous behind me. I feel all the blood drain from my face.

“Sasuke - RUN!” Sasuke takes one look at whatever madness was forming behind me and sprints for the front door. I yell after him desperately, “AND DON’T LOOK BACK!”

I slam the door and slowly turn around, nearly floored by the sheer gallons of tears streaming from Gai’s eyes.

“Oh fuck.”

TENTEN

“What’s wrong, Lee? I ask, unsure what he was so jumpy about.

He gives me a winning - although strained - smile, “It is nothing, Tenten! I was simply wondering for what reason Gai-sensei would be this late! Especially for our genin exam! It is most-unYouthful!”

I frown and cast a sideways glance at Neji - who looks like he couldn’t care less. “‘So late?’ He told us to meet him here in five minutes - how is that late?”

“Gai-sensei always trains far before sunrise. Not only that, but he is always also early! That he is not here - despite the sun being up for hours and us having arrived - is most irregular!”

I think on that. I was just about to comment on how that was kind of odd when I heard a yell off in the distance.

“GAI, IF YOU DON’T SLOW DOWN I’M GONNA PUKE!”

“I CANNOT, YOUNG KONOHA LOTUS! I AM LATE!”

Lee and I lock eyes, and I can see that he’s just as excited as I was confused. “Why would Gai-
In a flash of green and a felled tree, Gai-sensei was suddenly there with a black sack slung over his shoulder.

“My most Youthful students! How I apologize for not arriving earlier, but I had a separate matter to address!”

“Students?!”

We all look around, confused. ‘Who said that?’ I thought. ‘Oh kami, that isn’t a sack, is it?’

“Gai-sensei!” I exclaim, pointing at the thing over his shoulder. “Is that a person?”

The kid - because no one else could be that small - squirms in Gai’s firm grip at my voice, “GAI! Tell me you didn’t break into my bedroom at four in the morning - wake up Sasuke - and cry all over me just so I could meet your new Genin! Please, this is complete bull-”

Gai stops the with a sudden glare and slings her off his back. “And that -” he points at the girl “- is exactly why we’re here!”

She scowls and crosses her arms, looking away from the towering form of our sensei. Now that she was on the ground, I could get a good look at her and I was struck by how small she was. She looked a couple years younger than us, and was really tiny. She wore no visible hiatate-ate or Clan crest - only black boots, a pair of worn dark navy pants, and a light blue tunic over a mesh top. She looked tired, like she was just dragged out of bed, and as she stood she messily but efficiently pulled all of her incredibly curly, long, dark hair into a bun at the back of her head.

I looked between her and Gai-sensei, and couldn’t see any similarities to indicate any relation between them. Just who was this girl?

The jounin turns his back on the girl and faces the three of us, a smile back on his face. “My apologies again for my haphazard entry! It was most unYouthful of me to arrive so late!”

At the sound of his sensei’s words, Lee tears his eyes away from the girl with a grin on his face. “Gai-sensei! Is that Noa-hasu?”

Noa ... Lotus? Huh? Did Lee know this girl?

Gai-sensei grins like Lee was just promoted to chunin. “Why yes, my most Youthful student!” He exclaims, and then turns to Neji and I, gesturing at the girl. “This is my first student, Noa-hasu! She has been training with me for years in a most Youthful manner! I had intended to just introduce the three of you today, after the three of you hopefully pass your genin exam. But alas, I found out that our young Konoha Blossom has been acting most-unYouthfully as of late!”

I sneak a glance at the girl - Noa or whatever - and I see her looking calculatively at Neji and I. This was Gai-sensei’s first student? But she had to still be in the Academy! And what did Gai mean by ‘acting unYouthfully?’

I sneak a glance at the girl - Noa or whatever - and I see her looking calculatively at Neji and I. This was Gai-sensei’s first student? But she had to still be in the Academy! And what did Gai mean by ‘acting unYouthfully?’

The girl looked away from us sharply when she saw that I had caught her looking, and turns to Gai, ignoring us. “Gai. I said that I was sorry, but what do you expect? You constantly show up right when I have my guard down and I have to react somehow! It was either that or run you through with my sai! (A/N a three pronged sword)”
Hold up: this girl used a *sai*? Was she another weapons specialist?

Gai did not look satisfied by her explanation. “I would rather you come at me with a blade than with unYouthful words such as those! Where did you even learn such vulgar words in your language? You were orphaned at such a young age - did your *Auntie* speak to you like that?”

‘*Your language.*’ My eyes widen, ‘*This is the foreign girl all those shinobi were talking about? She’s Gai’s student?’

Noa groans again, and begins to massage her temples. “Gai. As I said. My cussing wasn’t aimed at you, it was just an outlet for my surprise. AND - what does it matter where I learned to cuss in English? My family’s too dead to hear your rants about ‘How to Properly Raise a Youthful Child,’ okay?”

Lee was looking at Noa in a new light, and I suddenly remembered that he was an orphan too. I wonder briefly if he saw any of himself in her.

“Regardless, it is most unYouthful to use such language - I wish to never hear any of it again. And - in an attempt to regain some of your lost Youth - you are to help me run this genin test.” Gai stated with finality. “Originally, this test was to be an exercise for my three Youthfully new genin to attempt to win two bells from me. However, because of Noa-hasu I am changing the test.”

Gai pulled three bells from his belt, holding them up. “Your goal is not only to win a bell me but to also keep the bells safe from Noa-hasu. She cannot steal a bell from me, only from one of you. If she gets even one bell you all fail and return to the Academy. You have either until all three of you have a bell or until Noa runs out of chakra - whichever comes first - to complete your task.”

I glance warily at Noa, and she suddenly had a sai in each hand that she *definitely* didn’t have on her before.

I would cuss - but Gai-sensei made it clear that he was against that.

Neji, Lee and I form a defensive triangle - backs to each other.

“What. Still needs. A bell?” Lee pants out, too tired even to be Youthful.

“Me.” I gasp, catching my breath - hand at a stitch in my side.

Even Neji - Rookie of the Year - was exhausted, his arms shaking in his taijutsu stance. “I don’t understand,” He grits out - frustrated. “I saw that girl’s chakra levels. She should not have the chakra endurance to continue on this long.”

“Well apparently she does,” I grind out. “And if she catches even one of you we all lose.”

“Let us work together to win Tenten a bell!” Lee insists with newfound vigor. “If we fend off both Noa-hasu and approach Gai-sensei together - as a team - we have all the more chance of success!”

Neji nods decisively, “Then let us go.”

“You have succeeded, my most Youthful new genin!” Gai cried as soon as Lee wraps his hand
fully around the bell at the jounin’s waist. “Noa-hasu! You fought most Youthfully as well!”

I collapse - literally sliding down a tree trunk as my legs gave out - as Noa drops from the branches above me. She looks tired and winded but not nearly as bad as I feel. “Does that mean, Gai,” She pants out. “That I can go home now? Ruto has probably burned the village down by now - I have been gone for six hours.”

Six. Hours.

‘WHAT?’

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks to Karma for being the first to comment on my work here on AO3! I'm glad you all are enjoying!
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Naruto gets confronted by some genin. Noa just wanted to get groceries.

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

OMAKE - 2: Mitsuo and Ryo

UZUMAKI NARUTO

“Hey brat! Just what do you think you’re doing!”

Naruto looked down from where he was sitting on a low tree branch, waiting for Noa to finish with their shopping for the month. Nee-chan had promised that she would teach him how to make bread today so they could bring sandwiches to class for lunch, and I was really excited! She just had to go to the market to get as much wheat flour as she could - cuz she wanted to make enough to give to Sasuke and her teacher too.

Below him was a small gathering of shinobi that he didn’t recognise. Their hitai-ate bore a simplistically designed hourglass - shinobi from Sunagakure then. Boy, was I so glad that Nee-chan had forced me to memorize stuff like all the villages and what their symbols were! It was boring at first, but it was so good to know things!

They looked like they were a Genin cell - cuz none of them had Chunin vests and they were really young - only without their jounin-sensei. But why were they talking to him?

I leaned back off the branch and hung upside down by my knees, ending up at about eye level with the tallest Genin. “Nani? Are you talking to me?”

A rather short, grumpy looking Genin wearing a beige tunic glared up me - maybe he didn’t like talking to people? “Yes - you! What do you think you’re doing?”

I felt really confused - cuz they already asked that and the question made no sense. “Uuuuuuuuh … I’m waiting in a tree,” I stated in a no-duh tone.

Another Genin - this one a girl with really long blonde hair going down her back in a complicated braid - narrowed her eyes at him. “Waiting? What are you waiting for?” She demanded, sounding like she wanted to pick a fight.

The last Genin - the tall one - made a placating gesture at his teammates, his shaggy hair falling
into his face. “Gurina! Haato! Just because he’s in a tree doesn’t mean that he’s a threat to our client!”

The girl - presumably Gurina - rounded on her teammate. “Of course he could be! Don’t be fooled by him - he could be under a Henge!”

‘If I was an enemy - wouldn’t I know that they were suspicious now? And do they not know how to tell if someone’s under a Henge?’ I thought, thoroughly confused now. Aloud, I addressed the Genin squad. ‘I don’t know who your ‘client’ is - ttebayo, but I can tell you I’m just waiting for someone who went to get groceries! If you don’t believe me - then you can just be annoyed, cuz I said I would wait here!’

Haato went red in the face, looking furious. “Why you -!”

“Otouto!” A male voice called out, startling me and cutting off the Genin. “Why are you bothering those shinobi? Can’t you stay out of trouble for one minute while I get our groceries?”

We all turn to face the man walking towards us - older than Iruka-sensei, but still young. He had a bag of groceries in each hand and was kinda on the short side - like me and Nee-chan - but wasn’t skinny like we were. I realize in a shock that he looks just like me! He has blonde hair that was all yellow and spiky - sticking out in all directions like mine did! His was longer than mine towards the bottom, with long-ish bangs. He wasn’t as tan as me, but he had the same blue eyes that I see whenever I look in the mirror.

With a jolt recognised the ‘man’s’ chakra signature, and I fight to keep the surprise off my face. Nee-chan was under a Henge! Here to save me from these really annoying Genin by pretending to be my Nii-san!

Playing along, I dropped from the tree and ran right up to ‘him,’ “Nii-san! I waited here like you told me to! Even when these really annoying strangers came up to me and told me to leave I stayed! Cuz you told me to - ttebayo!”

Noa chuckles lightly, and frees up one of ‘his’ hands to mess up my hair. Why did she suddenly have to be the taller one?

‘He’ turns to face the Genin - who were looking a little guilty for suspecting a little kid waiting for his brother. “Ohayo,” ‘He’ greets, bowing his head slightly in respect. “I am Kamikaze Mitsuo, and this is my brother Ryo. Ryo did not mean to disturb your work, and if he did then I’m sure that he would apologize properly for it.”

‘Mitsuo’ gives me an expectant look, and I force myself to blush - scratching the back of my head as if embarrassed. “I’m sorry, Shinobi-san. I didn’t mean to disrupt your work.” I recite tonelessly, and ‘Mitsuo’ cuffs me lightly across the back of my head.

For some reason the girl - Gurina - looks kinda red, like that one time Nee-chan got a fever. She goes all rad when ‘Mitsuo’ smiles at her! “Thhhat’s already Kamikaze-san. No harm done! No harm done!”

I have to hold in a laugh then - cuz her teammates were looking kinda angry at her for some reason and the Haato guy was going all purple. Nee-chan must realize that I was close to bursting cuz ‘he’ moved all of his grocery bags into one hand before he grabs my hand.

He bows slightly to the Genin cell again, and gives another serene smile. “Thank you for taking care of my otouto. May your stay in Konoha be pleasant.”
As we walk down the street, I glance around at all the shocked looks that we were getting from all kinds of people. I guess it was really weird to see the ‘demon-child’ orphan with an obvious family member? I didn’t get it.

I look up at Nee-chan, and tug on our still connected hands to get ‘his’ attention. ‘He’ looks down at me with a small smile still on ‘his’ face - ‘still in character’ as Nee-chan always called it. “Yes, Ruto?”

I smile at the familiar nickname. “How long are you gonna stay like that? It must be taking up a lot of chakra!”

‘He’ laughs gently, and I feel a shot of pain through my chest - is this what it’s like to have a Nii-san? I know that it’s really just Nee-chan - and I love her - but sometimes I want to have a normal family, like what Sasuke had.

“Yes, this is draining my chakra - but I need it to.”

I think for a second on what ‘Mitsuo’ said. Nee-chan never talks cryptically unless she wants me to figure something out on my own - kinda like Iruka-sensei. We walk in silence for a couple more minutes - with me staring at the ground - until I get it!

I tug on ‘his’ hand again, and when ‘he’ looks down at me I give ‘him’ a winning smile. “You want to see how long you can hold a full Henge before the drain becomes too much!” I declare, and based off ‘his’ smile - I got it right!

‘Mitsuo’ had already opened his mouth to respond when -

“MINATO?”

At the sound of the woman’s voice, we stop dead in our tracks. The two of us turned around to see Shikamaru and two adults that I had never seen before - but who both kinda looked like him - coming around the corner. The adults (Shikamaru’s parents?) looked like they had seen a ghost and the woman was staring open mouthed at Nee-chan.

“Naruto?” Shikamaru calls out to us, glancing in between his frozen parents (?) and ‘Mitsuo’ and looking just as confused as I felt. “Who’s that with you? And who’s Minato?”

That seems to jolt the grown-ups out of their shock, and they immediately begin to look very suspicious. “Who are you,” the man demands - his lazy Nara demeanor gone, hand creeping towards the pouch on his leg.

‘Mitsuo’ holds up his hands in an obvious lack of aggression. “Whoa!” Nee-chan calls out, dropping the Henge in a poof - further confusing Shikamaru and again shocking the adults. “I don’t know who Minato is, but we just wanted to get some groceries!”

NOA

I knew that I had taken a risk using Minato as a base for a Henge like that, but when I saw Ruto starting a fight with some Suna-nin and I decided to try taking out two or three birds with one stone.

Ruto had - as always - played his part really well, and she really wanted to see a) how the villagers
would react seeing their dead Yondaime walking with their village outcast and b) how long she could hold a Henge at this stage in the game.

She hadn’t expected to be called Minato by name and to be carted off to the Hokage Tower by the Jonin Commander.

But there they were.

“Jiji! We said we were sorry for using a Henge, but we didn’t do anything bad! I was gonna be in trouble with those Suna-nin and Nee-chan got me out of it! She only kept the Henge up so long cuz she wanted to see how good she was at holding it!”

‘Oh Ruto. If only that was the problem.’ I thought bitterly, showing only mirrored confusion on my face. Dying and coming back to life in a different world really makes a chick a better liar.

The Sandaime rubs his temples and turns to face me. “Noa-chan. Would you be so kind as to show me the Henge-d form you used?”

I continued to broadcast confusion as I form my own - signless - Henge. With an almost inaudible poof, I stood before the Hokage wearing the face of someone who could’ve been a brother of his successor and an uncle to Ruto. He hid his shock well - he clearly hadn’t expected the similarity to be quite so striking.

“What made you come up with this form? I don’t believe that anyone in the village looks quite like him.” The Sandaime’s voice was low and calm, but I could hear the sliver of suspicion there - he was probing me.

I drop the Henge and furrow my brows in forged confusion. “I used Ruto as a model - his hair and eyes and coloring - cuz I needed to look like his brother. Then I used bits and pieces from people I knew - body like the plumber that fixed the toilets in the Academy, short like Miss Anko, lighter skin like Gai-sensei, face shape like Iruka-sensei - stuff like that. Did I do something wrong?”

The atmosphere in the room relaxes almost imperceptibly - and I wouldn’t have noticed if not for my heightened attention and senses. They believed me, and after all they had no reason not to.

“Noa-chan,” I turn to face the Nara Head. “In the future, don’t wander through the village like that under a Henge unless it’s for a good reason, okay?”

“O-okay?” I question and look back at Ruto, secretly relieved that I’d just avoided the worst.

“Can we go now?” Ruto asks impatiently. “Nee-chan’s cooking dinner!”
The alarm sounds - and the Bell Test ends.

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

HATAKE KAKASHI - PART TWO

The three tired genin-hopefuls stood in defensive positions, giving their all in one last ditch effort. Attempt after attempt had been thwarted by Kakashi: first by his escaping the chain, then by dispelling each genjutsu effortlessly and evading each ninjutsu easily.

He had to hand it to them. They had resilience.

“Naruto hand-to-hand, support with clones. Get that bell! Noa mid range, whatever weapons you can whip out. I’ll long range support until one of you needs relief or backup. Clear?” Sasuke called out rapid fire, receiving decisive nods and readied stances in response.

“Go!”

Immediately six Naruto’s were on him, supported by volley after volley of kunai and shuriken coming from Sasuke. Noa was out of his line of sight -

A weight was suddenly on his shoulders and he had to reach up and grab Noa’s ankles to throw her off and away. Something wrapped around his wrist and he saw that Noa had wrapped what looked like a spiked ball attached by a chain to a handle around his arm, throwing his balance. A chigiriki? He yanked his arm back, using his superior weight and strength to tear the strange weapon from her grasp. As it hit the ground it shattered in a burst of chakra shards.

‘She really does construct weapons out of pure chakra.’

There was no pause in the fighting as Sauske was suddenly there and Naruto’s clones gave supportive fire while he engaged in a two way taijutsu fight between the Uchiha and Noa.

And so they fought, neither side gaining a clear advantage until -

Tinkle...

BRRRIIIING!

At the sound of the alarm clock going off all motion stopped. They all stood frozen, Naruto’s hand wrapped around the bell still tied to Kakashi’s waist.

Noa’s even voice breaks through the tangible silence.
“Kakashi-sensei. Did that - in your eyes - count?”

They boys maintain their ready stances; Naruto’s hand still firmly around the bell - not having shifted a centimeter. I look each of them in the eye in turn before locking eyes with Noa.

“No.”

Silence.

“Again.” Sasuke demands, voice hard but shaking with barely concealed rage and frustration.

“No.” I repeat, my eye still boring into Noa’s, her face as void of emotion as my own mask. Impressively so.

“Kakashi-sensei!” Naruto growls from his position at my side. “This is a test. Tests can be retaken. Give us another chance!”

“No. Noa, pack your bags.”

“NO!” Naruto roars as a swarm of clones appear in opening taijutsu stances. Sasuke, shaking in fury, joins him and the mass of bodies shield Noa from my line of sight.

“RUTO, STOP. SASUKE, STOP.” Movement ceases at Noa’s cries, and the foreign girls shoves through the throng of clones and stands with her arms spread wide as if to shield me from her friend’s rage.

“But Nee-chan -!”

“No. Ruto! Stop. Drop the clones.” As Noa takes a deep breath, Naruto begins to dispel his clones. “Better.”

She drops her arms and turns to face me, a look of both resignation and determination on her face. She inclines her head slightly as if thanking me. “Hatake-san. You were the proctor for this exam and by the rules of it you have the right to pass or fail us. I took this test knowing the risks -” She holds up a single hand to silence the outburst coming from her two closest friends. “- I only have one question.”

I gesture for her to go on, and she centers herself with a breath. “Hatake-san. Would you be so kind as to tell me where I can apply for citizenship of Konohagakure no Sato and subsequently enter into the Academy in hopes of becoming a kunoichi?”

Behind Noa, I see Naruto’s jaw drop and Sasuke looked like a deer in the way of a fire jutsu. I decide to draw it out even further; after all those faces were just too priceless.

“Oh? Well as I said you’ve lost all immunity you’ve had here in Konoha. Officially, you have no ties here. You don’t have to be anchored down to this village; the village which wants to earn your trust only to learn your secrets. Wouldn’t you rather leave? To go find what’s left of your people?”

The boys hold their breath, but Noa simply smiles softly and shakes her head. “I may not have my clan but I am already among my people, Hatake-san. Konoha is my home and even those here who wish me dead I would protect with my last breath. I cannot leave them. So, Hatake-san, I ask again. Where may I apply for citizenship and Academy admittance?”

I lay a light genjutsu, using KI to make myself seem more menacing. “YOU-!” I thunder out watching as the three rookies fight to stand their ground.
Then I change my demeanor in an instant, “Pass!”

Silence. One blink. Two.

All at once they react. Sasuke’s jaw drops, looking dumbfounded and completely unlike any Uchiha should be. Naruto cheers unintelligibly, and leaps straight at Noa and sending them both tumbling to the ground. Noa - well, Noa looked like she was just given the moon on a silver platter.

It was Noa who was the first able to form words, “What ?!”

I give her an eye smile, “You pass!”

Naruto jumps up, dragging Noa along with him. “But we didn’t get the bell! You said that we didn’t get the bell!”

“Not that we’re complaining!” Noa clarifies quickly.

The lightness I felt yesterday returns to my chest. And I can tell that this was going to do me some good, this team was.

“The test. Looking underneath the underneath,” I explain cheerily. “Originally this test had two bells, and ‘the one who didn’t get a bell had to go back to the Academy.’ But it was actually a test designed to see if the rookies could each put aside their own interests for the sake of the mission: a test of teamwork.

“But the three of you already proved that you were capable and willing to work with each other so the test had to be changed.”

I look over at Noa, seeing a calculating look on face. I raise my eyebrow at her in a clear invitation to hazard a guess. A startled look crosses her exotic features but she quickly schools her expressions as she puzzles it over.

A moment passes but then her viridian eyes widen, and I know she’s got it. “It was about investment. And emotions.”

Seeing her teammate’s confusion, she clarified for them. “The test was designed to see if we could still function with a teammate on the line. To see if we could keep a level enough head to not only complete the mission but to not jeopardize our teammates by being only calculative.

“If we were to use only logic in this situation, then the two of you should’ve logically negotiated a way for your own pass instead of mine, or maybe in exchange for my failure. ‘The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few’ and all, especially since I’m not actually a citizen of Konoha. But if we were too emotional, then we can’t think straight and the mission fails regardless. Kakashi-sensei was testing to see if we would be liabilities to each other in the field.”

I nod my head, “Very good, Noa-chan. And as I said: you all pass.”

The boys converge in on their friend, Naruto glomping Noa from the side and Sasuke squeezing her arm warmly. Noa looks on top of the world, right at home in the middle of all of the chaos.

I feel another unavoidable smile cross my features, and I let it. “Meet here tomorrow at 7 am sharp for team training and your first official mission!”

“HAI!”
“...Team 7 - under Hatake Kakashi?”

I feel all eyes on me as I lazily look up from my Icha Icha. I, or rather, my team, was the reason that so many jounin that didn’t strictly need to be here were present today. I had the team that the entire village had its eyes on.

I quietly close Icha Icha and ignore the eyes on me with practiced ease. “Team 7 completed the modified bell test with relative ease. I nominate them to be a future Offensive Unit with a Field Medic.”

I look around, and the gathered shinobi seemed rather shocked (Anko and Shikaku being the exceptions). Huh, I wonder if Tora got all of their tongues. You know cats.

“They pass,” I clarify helpfully, the only sound in the silent room.

Hokage-sama recovers first and smiles warmly, and I know that he had grown to have quite a liking for my cute little genin. “Yes, thank you Kakashi. Please tell whomever you think would be most suited to be a medic to report to the Hospital as to apply for an internship.”

As the room begins to recover, I can’t pass up the perfect opportunity. “That reminds me, Hokage-sama. I have news to deliver in regards to Noa-chan.”

Immediately, all eyes are back on me as tensions again rise. ‘News about Noa-chan’ that doesn’t go through the normal channels was something considered essential - so I decided to tease them a bit.

“Noa-chan has expressed interest to become an official citizen of Konohagakure no Sato. I told her I would help expedite the process.”

I Sushin out of the frozen room with an eye smile and a laugh on my lips.

“My ETERNAL RIVAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAL !”

I immediately and automatically doge the Dynamic Entrance, leaning so far I nearly hit a nearby tree. Nearly.

“Afternoon, Gai. Back from your mission already?”

“My ETERNAL RIVAL! YOU HAVE BECOME THE JOUNIN INSTRUCTOR FOR YOUTHFUL NOA-HASU!”

“Yes, Gai - I have. What of it? I passed her - isn’t that what you wanted? For her to become a genin?” I was confused, Gai seemed genuinely upset. He had been going on about how excited he was that Noa was finally twelve for weeks.

“But I harbored hopes that she would still be under my tutelage! MY RIVAL, WE MUST COMPETE FOR THE RIGHT TO BE HER SENSEI!” Gai seemed almost in tears, and I suddenly realize what this was about.

“Whoa whoa WHOA ! GAI !” Finally having his attention, I make a placating gesture. “I won’t ask
Noa-chan to stop her training with you! I would even encourage it! I saw how much she improved under you during her genin test. Just because we’re rivals doesn’t mean that I will force you to fight me over the right to teach her!

Anyway, if Sasuke becomes our genjutsu expert and Naruto our ninjutsu expert - I’m going to need a taijutsu specialist. I see no better way for Noa-chan to become formidable than to train under you.”

Suddenly, I’m in a bear-sized hug - and I’m seeing stars and rainbows. “MY ETERNALLL RIVAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAL! YOU ARE SO YOOOOOOOOOOUTHFUUUUUUUUUUL !”

What I said was true - but I mostly just wanted him to stop crying! Why was he still crying?! 
GENIN - PART ONE

Chapter Summary

Shika just wants to cloud watch. Noa finds Kakashi to be both more and less infuriating face to face.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

GENIN - PART ONE

NARA SHIKAMARU

The day was a perfect one. Clouds in the sky, but still sunny and warm enough to be outside without too many layers. The grass was coming in well, no doubt the Nara compound’s new way of seeding was paying off. The air was quiet, and barely a breeze rustled in the calm afternoon air.

“STAG ! STAG ! Stag Stag Stag STAAAAAAAG !”

I wince, and I can hear Tou-san chuckling from the porch. Tou-san may have never been told exactly what that nickname meant (or even that it was a nickname) but after hearing it nearly every day for the last two years, he picked up the idea of it.

Blatantly refusing to sit up from where I was laying in the grass - knowing that Noa wouldn’t care if I was laying down or running up a tree - I wait for my strange foreign friend to dart in from wherever troublesome girls like her spring from each morning.

As it turns out, I didn’t have to wait long. Barely a minute passes before I suddenly have an armful of curly hair and wiry elbows. “Ooof!” I gasp as all of the air in my body was forced out in an instant, “Get off me, you troublesome girl!”

Laughing, Noa sits back on her heels, waving some kind of form I'm far too lazy to take a proper look at in my face. “Hello to you too, Stag! Guess what! Guess what!"

I close my eyes, rubbing my ears in vain against the assault on my senses and pretend that I don’t hear Tou-san’s quiet laughter in the background. “I dunno, what?”

My frustration only seems to spur her on, because she flops down on her back next to me with another laugh and holds up the form to admire from as many angles as she can. “So grumpy, Shika! I haven’t seen you for days! I passed my genin exam and - here’s the news - my sensei helped me get the paperwork done faster!” She shoots off rapidfire and she sits up, pulling me along with her. “Nara Shikamaru, I am now officially - as of half an hour ago - a citizen of
Konohagakure no Sato!”

“What?” It takes a sec for what she just said to hit me, and I belatedly realise that my tou-san has
go quiet. “What?! You got your citizenship? Wait you didn’t even have your citizenship?!
What ?!”

Noa stifles a laugh behind her hands, and I catch a glimpse of the village’s official seal on the
paper in her hand. “Yeah! I didn’t know that I didn’t either! But then my sensei said that if I didn’t
pass our genin exam then I’d lose any immunity that I had in Konoha (which would be bad) but I
passed and he helped my expedite the process to get my citizenship! Isn’t that great ?!”

I hear a choking sound behind me. Tou-san.

“He threatened to do what ?”

NOA

Kakashi was both more and less infuriating face to face.

Or, well, as face to face as you get when one of the faces is basically just an eye.

Reading about him in the books only half prepared me for actually going face to face with the man.
My knowledge of him and his past made understanding him and how he functioned easier.
Knowing his values and where he frequented and why he did things was helpful to say the least.

I could also say with conviction that Kakashi was a far better teacher this time around. Without the
added stress of Ruto’s completely sabotaged education, Sasuke’s possibility of defecting and
obsession with revenge, and Sakura’s fangirling - all of which amounted to a very troublesome
(blame the Nara) Team 7 - Kakashi was patient while also demanding. I felt pushed by him, yet
also encouraged.

His quirks were worse in person though. It was all well and good to think about how annoying it
would be to wait three hours for your sensei to show up, but it was far worse when you were
actually waiting those three hours. We still showed up on time every day (Kakashi was so the kind
of person to show up on time that one day we were late) but with a gentle push from me, the boys
and I actually utilized the waiting time as independent training rather than just slothing around.
This seemed to be the catalyst that Kakashi was looking for and as we trained more consistently in
our down time he began to come earlier and earlier (although still late).

Ruto and surprisingly Sasuke were still as determined as ever to see under Kakashi’s mask. Their
failures were hilarious to me (although I kept that myself) and only seemed to encourage them
further. I decided that there was no logical way to gloat that I had seen the artist’s sketches of the
mysterious jounin before I got dumped in this world and therefore didn’t care that he was pretty
handsome under that fabric, beauty mark and all.

Kakashi seemed surprised by my complete and utter lack of interest in his face but I spelled it out
for him when he alluded to it one day after a particularly embarrassing attempt by the boys.

“A person’s face doesn’t really matter,” I had shrugged. “If you wanted us to see it you would
show us. You not showing your face is your right - as it is the right for anyone to show or not show
their face to whomever they choose. I show my face proudly because I wish to embrace my
heritage with pride. Sasuke shows face in order to allow his clan to live on through him. Ruto
wishes everyone to see his face, to see him for who he is. In the end, it doesn’t matter what one’s face looks like only what choices they make and what is in their hearts. I will judge you by your actions, Kakashi-sensei, not whether you have balloon lips or buck teeth.”

After Team 7 has existed for three weeks (and we had successfully completed 323 D-ranks: a ten year record - I hear) I decided it was time to address something important.

“I think it’s about time that we begin to teach you English, Kakashi-sensei.” I call out casually to our teacher from where I was perched on a tree branch towards the end of training.

Kakashi, to his credit, froze in his movements for only a second before he went back to demonstrating a more advanced kata for Ruto. He didn’t comment as he finished walking him through, focused on only how to improve Ruto’s rather dismal stances and not on the bomb I had just dropped on him.

I had a pretty good idea what was going through his head. He was wondering what he had done to earn my trust. Just helping me with paperwork didn’t fit my ‘patterns.’

Up until now, I had yet to teach a single adult English - not even Iruka-sensei. Iruka-sensei, who I’ve known for five years and went so far as to entrust with Ruto, who after those same five years only knew a few words and common phrases. Of course it was arrogant to think that terms like Mr. or Miss and common words like yes and no hadn’t been translated (or at least close to) but English was still largely a mystery to the people of this land.

I knew that once I taught Kakashi English he would be forced to report it to the Hokage, as was inevitable when divulging closely guarded secrets to an elite jounin, but I didn’t plan on teaching him too much. Just basics at first, as to test the waters in a way. I still had my limited skill with Spanish to fall back on, after all.

The topic doesn’t come up again for nearly three days, but when I feel confident that Kakashi wasn’t about to jump at me and demand to learn as much as possible as soon as possible I decide to get started.

Teaching Ruto and Sasuke was a long process in which I would start slipping more and more words into my everyday conversations, defining as I went. Teaching Shika was an issue of increasing both of our vocabularies so we traded words by explaining definitions as we went.

But Kakashi was an adult with an adult mindset. I had no such goal to increase my own vocabulary, only to teach him the basics he’d need to call commands and understand the battlefield, so I needed to have a different approach. Plus, he would want things that he could take the time to memorize with his Sharingan. After some brainstorming, I decided to take a more elementary school style approach.

That morning about halfway through training I used my chakra to create a low desk in the middle of Training Ground 7, pulling out pencils and sheets of paper that I had bought the night before. Ruto and Sasuke saw what I was planning and quickly beckoned Kakashi over before sitting down to watch the show.

Kakashi was curious (as any genius of his caliber would be) but he still kept his cool, lazily
walking over to where I was beginning to write up the basic alphabet. As he sits down and begins to look over my shoulder, I jump right into ‘teacher mode’ - eyes still on my paper.

“English is fundamentally different than Common on even the most basic level. I’m not nearly bored enough to draw up a list but both languages have sounds that the other doesn’t, and sentence structure is very different. Common also has two different forms of writing - kanji and the kana systems ( A/N I’m not familiar enough with Japanese to be precise with this explanation. Please forgive my need to simplify and any errors ). The meanings behind kanji are based off each stroke and the meaning varying even if the sound is still the same. The kana systems are more based off sounds therefore allowing for more variety and less precise meanings. There are hundreds upon thousands of symbols used in your language to represent your writing system.”

I finish writing, going back to the top of the page to write ‘THE ALPHABET’ in careful block script, and turn to look at Kakashi. I jump back when he’s far closer than I realized with his face mere inches from my left shoulder, looking with no small fascination with my neat lettering.

I recover quickly, and gesture at the sheet in front of me; holding it between the two of us so he had as clear a view as possible. “English is different. We are more like a code of sorts. There are 26 characters called ‘letters’ with two variations of each letter called ‘capital’ and ‘lowercase’ distinguished based off significance. Capital letters give a character added significance that lowercase don’t have. All the letters can be compiled into one list called the ‘Alphabet’.”

I gesture at the two distinguishments and the title, and when I see that he was following I continue on. “Different combinations of letters form different sounds and it’s all phonetic. However, because English is stupid and was formed from a mix of a bunch of different languages from thousands of years ago the rules suck and are barely ever consistent with a crap load of exceptions. Don’t worry though, we’ll start basic.”

I pull out another sheet of paper, the lined kind that was used to keep Common writing neat. “Your people write top to bottom, left to right. In English, however -” I rotate the paper 90 degrees “- you write left to right, top to bottom.”

Placing the paper carefully on the table, I clearly pencil ‘Kakashi Hatake’ in neat roman letters. “The capital letter signifies that it’s a proper noun, a proper noun, and that it’s the name of something. This would be your ‘first name’ - your given name - and your ‘last name’ - your clan name.” I point at the each name, and catching his confused look I quickly clarify.

“You’ve heard me call people Mr. or Mrs. right? Our naming system is different. The given name comes first and the clan name last, hence first and last. Honorifics don’t really exist; only titles, and those come before the name.”

I slide over the paper in front of him and drop the pencil on top with a slight clack. “This is where you start. Copy over the Alphabet at least two times and your name until you can write it by memory. If you can do that we can move onto words.”

As Kakashi picks up his pencil apprehensively I turn to my team. “Who’s up for target practice?”

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Kakashi was getting his writing down fast, his writing neater than even neat-freak Sasuke, though I would think that Obito’s Sharingan sped up the process quite a bit. After I described the name of each letter and the basic sound that each one made, I made a simple list of basic shinobi terms with Common definitions next to them; words like ‘throwing star’ and ‘ninja.’ After he inevitably memorized and began pronouncing passably, we moved on to verbs and essential adjectives.
After I decided that the elite jounin was chock full of words that he could use on missions and communicate orders to us with I gave him his first proper assignment.

"Okay!" Declared with finality after drilling Kakashi on everything from ‘jump’ to ‘bleeding’ to ‘shadow clone.’ “Now you need to start getting used to mixing!"

Kakashi looked at me like I had just grown a second head and Ruto began cracking up from his somewhat precarious position in a nearby tree. I continue to grin a bit ferally at my ‘student.’

"Mixing!" I repeat with a level of enthusiasm that would make Gai proud. “You’ve got sentence structure and common verbs - plus writing, which Shika has trouble with - so now you gotta start hearing the oddities! I’m not a good enough teacher to remember all the words that you should know so you just gotta start hearing them and asking questions! I use idioms and terms that don’t translate well all the time, and when I talk sometimes I just kinda slip into English. So now I’m just gonna start doing it on purpose!”

Sasuke must’ve spotted some mistake that I made, and stepped in to save our sensei. “What Noa means is now she’s gonna start doing what she did to teach us. We’re all gonna start incorporating more and more English terms into our daily speech so you can get used to hearing them. Noa tones it back a lot around other people but she’s actually a lot more comfortable speaking in English, and the way she thinks uses English words most of the time. So instead of taking the time to translate whole chunks she’ll just gradually introduce you to more vocabulary.”

The Uchiha’s explanation must’ve made more sense than mine did, because the silver haired jounin nodded his understanding. He begins to stand and stretch when he suddenly turns to me. “‘Doing what she did to teach us?’” Kakashi repeated Sasuke’s words back at me, a hint of curiosity in his voice. “If you taught your cute little teammates verbally, then why did you take the time to write up the Alphabet and give me all of those word lists?”

I laugh at that, and decide that I would give him a bit to chew on. “Oh, that. Well, I know that you wouldn’t be satisfied with the whole ‘learn as you go’ principle even though that’s kinda how you teach. I figured that it’d be easier for you to get everything in your head with a list that you could…” I gesture up at my left eye, subtly referencing Kakashi’s still unrevealed Sharingan, “Look over yourself, see?”

Turning my back to him before I could properly gauge his response, I turn to Sasuke and Ruto: “Hey pests who eat my cooking! I need groceries and guess who gets to carry them?”

Chapter End Notes

So far, this story has been basically just the prologue. From here, I will be dividing the story into arcs. I'm starting with "Genin" then moving onto "Wave" and eventually move forward from there.

I don't know how long I will make each arc, but I will be doing it from multiple perspectives- but also from Noa's a lot. That is the reason for the change in naming conventions for chapters.

Thanks for Reading!
-Milo Of The Key
Chapter Summary

The first C-Rank begins.

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

HATAKE KAKASHI

“We’re out of D - ranks.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

The chunin-sensei who sometimes works as the Hokage’s assistant when he’s not holed up at the Academy (Iruka, I remind myself) looks rather embarrassed at this, but also pleased for some reason. “The mission office has already handed out all of it’s D-ranks. We don’t have any left. Team 7 took most of them, and the other rookies took the rest.”

I turn to my team, “Sorry cute students. No missions today.” I sound out in my best English, my grammar still poor though pronunciation ‘passable’ according to Noa-chan.

I turn back to thank Iruka (who looks shocked at my apparent ability to speak English in full sentences) anyway, but I’m cut off by a loud objection behind me.

“NO no no! Kakashi, I know that we are technically only a rookie team, but we need the money! Ruto and I both have no other forms of income, and we need to replace our old gear and eat once in awhile!” Noa objects loudly - and in English - and I take a second to translate as many words as I could.

“Yeah Kakashi-sensei! I need new shuriken, and we spent most of our money on rent and paper!” Naruto adds his two cents, and I begin to cave.

“Fine.” I turn back to Iruka who seemed to barely be following the conversation. “Iruka-sensei, I believe Team 7 is ready for its first C - Ranked mission.”

And boy was that a bomb to drop! I can feel the excited anticipation coming off Sasuke, and Naruto takes only a moment before he’s cheering unintelligibly and mixing languages to his heart’s content. Surprisingly Noa was the most collected, and I glance over to see an expression of calculation and concentration on her face as if she was planning the next move in a game of shogi.

I was intrigued. I had only seen that look on her face one time before, and that was when she was attempting to create the beginnings of one of her tricks - a brand new one that she said was a ‘gift for Ruto.’
I let her continue to ponder while Iruka begins to look for a suitable C-Rank. A minute passes, and just as Iruka was opening his mouth to speak -

“Iruka-sensei,” Noa cut in, an unreadable look on her face. “Are there any guarding missions?”

I hide my surprise, but felt it nonetheless. That was an odd request, did Noa have something in mind - a plan?

Iruka looked surprised, going back to the pile on his desk to retrieve a buried scroll. “Yes actually, there is. Just came in this morning, an escort to the land of waves. A bridge-builder.”

Noa actually smiles at that even though it’s more a grimace of strained anticipation. She snaps, pointing at the scroll. “That’s the one! Boys, whaddaya think?”

Naruto and Sasuke exchange slightly confused, although still excited, looks. They both shrug, and Naruto stretches with hands ending up on top of his head, “Why not? This is our first C-Rank, it should be one that one of us wants to do!”

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NOA

“What’s this? They’re just a bunch of brats - and a little girl too.” Tazuna burps, swiping the back of his hand across his mouth, bottle of sake in hand.

Little girl? I was 27! Well .. mentally. Technically. But I wasn’t some washup like pre-timeskip Sakura was!

I elect to ignore him, deciding just to prove him wrong in time, but my boys weren’t quite so professional. Sasuke began radiating (an impressively high level for a genin) Killing Intent and Ruto would’ve gone charging up to him threatening bloody murder if I hadn’t quickly chakra-string tied him to the floor.

This was going to be fun.

And honestly? I was less than thrilled about this mission. I would rather our (far more capable) team do this than Team 10 or some other rookie team considering this was one of the worst possible first C-Ranks we could’ve gotten, but I knew that this was an important progression. If I changed too much, then I wouldn’t be able to accurately predict what was to come. It may have turned B-Rank early on - and later A-Rank - but it was also a turning point in my boys’ Genin careers. Sasuke awoke his Sharingan, Ruto used Kurama’s chakra for the first time, and even Kakashi trusted us enough to use his Sharingan in front of us. All of these things (plus the mission pay and experience) needed to happen for us to be prepared for the upcoming Chunin Exams.

But that didn’t mean I needed to be happy about it!

Tazuna finished his rather drunken introduction, and we all set out for the village gates.

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I spot the puddle where I know the Kiri-nin Demon Brothers were hiding, far ahead on the road and decide that it’s about time to alert the others.
“Oooh Naruto-kun! I should teach you some new words as we’re on our way!” I exclaim with a level of fakeness that would’ve won my an Oscar. “I know some good one’s!”

I giggle with a level of girly-ness that made me feel physically ill, and Ruto picks up on what I’m doing in an instant, “Man, Noa-chan! You know so much stuff! What’s ‘tree?’ Oh! How would you say ‘I’m the greatest Shinobi ever in all of the Land of Fire?’”

Kakashi and Sasuke slow their pacing, clearly alerted considering Ruto and I never called each other by name. “Oooh that’s a hard one!” I pretend to think, and instead use it as an excuse to slow my pace almost to a crawl. “Oh! ‘Tree’ would be ‘Mist ninja’ and that really long sentence would be - umm - ‘In puddle ahead two average level who targeting!’”

We continue walking at our original pace and as we pass by the puddle, Naruto speaks up again. “Noa-chan! You talked too fast! I can’t remember all of that!”

RRRRRRRRRIIIIIIIIP!

The sound of Kakashi being ‘torn apart’ echoes in my ears, and my first battle in two lifetimes has begun.
GENIN - PART THREE

Chapter Summary

The first kill is always the worst.

Chapter Notes

Hey all! I'm really sorry for not updating and leaving you all in a lurch. I had the most horrible case of writers block even humanly possible. No excuse - but I hope that the quality makes up for it.

Lots of Love,
Milo Of The Key

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

NOA

In a flurry of movement, the Demon Brothers of the Bloody Mist were suddenly there with chains already shredding through the log that Kakashi had Kawarmi-ed with. We were on our guard already, and Sasuke and Ruto each jump to engage the enemy-nin while I fall back to defend Tazuna. With a twitch of my chakra, I’ve a kunai in each hand and I fall into an easy taijutsu stance.

The boys are doing well. Sasuke used a shuriken and kunai to pin down and break the chain while Ruto had clones engaging and distracting the Brothers. I could sense Kakashi in the bushes, observing our teamwork and hiding as a trump card. Based on how the boys were acting, they knew that he was just alive as they were.

The boys have the Mist-nin on the defensive, until the one with a single horn on his hitai-ate breaks away from Ruto’s Bushin swarm and bolts forward and past him and straight to Tazuna - to me. I knew that he was coming - had expected it - so I fell back on my training.


But training can’t prepare you for the feeling of a kunai that I had crafted with my own spirit and two hands being driven into a grown man’s jugular.
Training can’t prepare you for the smell and the feel of blood on your hand and in your nose and your mouth and you can taste it -

Training can’t prepare you for the overwhelming realization that I had just ended the life of a man who I didn’t even know the name of.

With a sick sound of wet suction, the nin falls off my kunai and I hear the poof of Kakashi’s Sushin.

HATAKE KAKASHI

As soon as I saw the look of pure, unadulterated terror on Noa-chan’s face at her first blood, I shushin back into the clearing - catching the second Demon Brother just as he was about to avenge his fallen brother.

The boys are unharmed, I can tell that just at a glance of how they hold themselves. The client was behind Noa-chan the whole time (something she should be proud of) and only was hit by a splattering of blood. But Noa -

Noa had an arm painted red. She was a medic, and although she only started basic training a month ago she still knew where to hit to kill someone instantly. The carotid artery was one of the most well guarded yet vulnerable spots on the human body.

Some part of me is proud she got such a clean hit.

But an artery is an artery, and I know that the horror of her first kill was worsened by that. Snapping someone’s neck was clean: it was simply a cessation of living. But an artery pumped blood; an artery sprayed blood on your hand and your clothes - in your hair and in your mouth and up your nose.

My first kill was a simple - a tanto through the heart. A stab through the neck as a first kill was something I would wish on no one, much less sweet little Noa-chan.

With a decisive blow to the back of the missing-nin’s neck, I shove the body toward the boys and kneel down in front of Noa, my movements slow and deliberate.

She flinches once I’m in front of her, but once her eyes focus on mine and I can see the horror and disgust at herself in her eyes. The boys are quiet behind me, and even the abrasive Tazuna has quieted down and stepped back (if only to get away from the dead body of his would-be murderer).

A shuddering breath, “Kakashi?”

I note her lack of honorifics, but decide to ignore it. “Yes, Noa-chan?” I ask, my voice level.

She seems to struggle for words, so I decide to cut in on her. “Noa-chan, you did your job. You did your job and you did it well. You protected both yourself and the client.”

I hear a shuffle behind me, and Naruto was slowly coming into Noa’s field of view, movements as slow and careful as mine were.

“Nee-chan?” Naruto asks, voice soft. “I know it’s scary that you killed him, but you did well. You remembered your training. We’re proud of you.”
I catch most of the words and pretty much all of the meaning, and I gently take her bloodied hand in mine. Using a spare shirt that Sasuke handed me along with my canteen I wipe some of the blood off her face and hands. Noa takes a second to process our words, and then collects herself.

“Thanks Ruto, Kakashi-sensei!” She exclaims in that joking tone she has that makes my chest hurt at the fakeness behind it. “I feel bad for Sasuke! He lost a bet last week, so he’s on laundry duty!”

NOA

I barely process that Ruto and Sasuke are trying to convince Kakashi to continue on with the mission despite the obvious bump up from a simple C-Rank. Even when Tazuna explain why he was being targeted, I barely hear anything. All I could think about was the sound of the Demon Brother falling off my kunai.

I didn’t even know his name. Did I want to know his name? Did I want to be able to think of him as just another face that I would never see again? Did I want to hear his story, to have compassion? Did I mourn him? Should I mourn him? What do you do when you’ve killed someone? Was it justified to kill someone who wanted to kill you?

This wasn’t the twenty first century in the US. This was the Elemental Nations - this was the Bloody fucking Mist! Killing was normal - as fucked up as this world and Mist’s genjutsu controlled Mizukage are.

It was my job. My friends knew this. My family knew this.

Then why did I feel so bloody guilty?

‘Because I was never supposed to turn out like this.’

Soon we’re on a boat, and as we paddle quietly to the Land of Waves I dip my hands quietly in the water, washing the last of the blood congealed on my hands off. It takes time before the last of the foreign red has left my hands, leaving behind only rubbed raw red skin, but I still feel filthy. Washing my face helps, but my once-blue tunic was drying as a stiff brown and the smell tangs my senses.

And suddenly I can’t stand it anymore.

The mist is thick, so I turn with my back to the boys and the civilians and strip of my tunic, quickly swapping it out for a clean (although more ragged) tank top.

I hear a strangled sound behind me, and I’ve a kunai in each hand in an instant, my instincts still on a high and ready to defend the client. Instead I’m faced with two surprisingly red faced genin and an unreadable expression on Kakashi’s face … something between embarrassment and worry? I honestly don’t know which preteen made such a strained and rather undignified sound (my money’s on Ruto) but all the same I give them my best unimpressed face and turn to begin to wash the blood from my tunic.

Boys, honestly. I haven’t hit puberty yet and I wasn’t facing them - but looking back, I probably should’ve waited till we were somewhere more private.

‘Hindsight is 20/20 vision’ and all.
Or something.
But as the water in our wake is dyed red, I can’t seem to be bothered by that. It was a good
distraction, though, no matter how brief.

“Noa-chan...”

Kakashi shouldn’t care, should he? He was the adult here, right?

And plus he reads porn like all the time. And in public. One might think that he had looser
standards hand in hand with that.

“Yes, Kakashi-sensei?” I reply, a little irritated, my voice pitched low. I may mentally be nearly
thirty, but right now I’m physically about as visually appealing as a toddler. I may be the only girl
there, but the boys were going to see me in some state of undress as some point. Might as well let
the first time be pre puberty and when I can control the circumstances.

As I prepare a mental speech of how I didn’t give a damn about who saw my body, he cuts me off.
“Your back.” He states, the seriousness of his voice throwing me off for a moment. “Have you
ever been injured on your back?”

I pause midway through ringing out my tunic and turn to face him. “What the hell are you talking
about?”

I wasn’t injured earlier today. And I can’t remember anything notable in the past. I honestly have
no idea what could’ve gotten into him; he takes a second to search my eyes in a fashion more
serious than I had ever seen him in this life before he sits back on his heels, seemingly satisfied
somehow.

I look to Sasuke in hopes that my more perceptive surrogate brother would have some kind of
insight on our sensei’s odd behavior, but he refused to meet my eyes, a blush still dusting his
cheeks.

I turn back to my tunic and squeeze the rest of the water from it, prudently exerting a bit of fast
moving chakra to warm up the shirt so it would dry even faster. Satisfied, I push any thoughts of
prepubescent boys and cryptic teachers to the back of my mind and lay my eyes on the upcoming
bridge and the knowledge of the Demon of the Bloody Mist that we would soon have to face.
Chapter Summary

Momochi Zabuza thought that this was going to be some straightforward job.

Chapter Notes

A couple of you amazing readers have commented on how Mary-Sue Noa is. Honestly, I’m rubbish about writing realistically, so I apologize for anyone who feels that way. Noa may seem idealistic - and I’ve put myself in a bit of a lurch with that - but rest assured I am putting in the effort to make her more human and less superhuman. Even if I may have two steps forward and one step back for a while.

Lots of Love, thanks for reading!

Milo Of the Key

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

NOA

Momochi Zabuza, one of the Seven Swordsmen of the Bloody Mist and dubbed the Demon of the Hidden Mist, was shirtless.

The shock of my (god fucking dammit don't' think about it don’t think about it) must’ve still been getting to me because when Kubikiribocho came flying over our heads and one of the most dangerous men in the entire country was standing on his sword all I could think about was how dorky those pants looked.

And that he was shirtless.

Goddamnit what was wrong with me?

(- The iron tang in my mouth -)

That didn’t last long because in that same instant that it took me to realize the extent of Zabuza’s bad taste I was already moving. I henge into one of many Ruto clones while Sasuke falls back to guard Tazuna as Ruto, his clones, and I all flanked Kakashi (waiting for him to finish dramatically unveiling his Sharingan). I suppose I should’ve acted surprised ( -Red. Blood red. My hand at the nin’s neck-) but I had already alluded to knowing about his extra gift, and I was too emotionally exhausted to act realistic at the moment.
Ruto did peer surprised at the eye, though, and I could feel Sasuke shift and stiffen at Zabuza’s words. Ignoring the byplay I kept my focus ahead and began to calculate how much chakra I would need to pin down his sword. That was our main issue: he was a swordsman. Dangerous with his sword, dangerous without - but without his sword we stood a better chance.

(-Not like that Demon Brother had. He didn’t have any chance-) In Ruto’s voice, I pitch my voice low so that Team 7 could hear me clearly, “One of the Seven Swordsmen - a missing nin. Watch for water prison and silent assassination. Have each other’s backs, and watch for him getting between you and others.”

(-I don’t want to see any more blood oh god please-) At the sound of my English, Zabuza twisted his face in a way that would probably look like him raising an eyebrow if he actually had any. He faces us full on rather than dramatically looking over his shoulder for the first time and peers over the swarm of Rutos with scrutiny.

“Well well. Looks like the little girl decided to hide among the crowd.” He chuckled darkly, and I fight to remain composed as his KI leaks out (-Oh god he’s going to kill me and I’m going to deserve it-) over the clearing. “Guess I’ll just have to mow them down.”

The lot of us duck as the Mist-nin’s massive butcher knife of a sword once again flies over our heads, Sasuke needing to pull Tazuna down with him, and with a whirl of the Sharingan and a burst of speed, Kakashi and Zabuza meet head on, blades locked.

(-Kunai in his neck. Blood on my arm-) But once again Zabuza is moving back, jumping to stand atop the water as his hands dramatically weave, calling out: “Hidden Mist no Jutsu.”

(-His last call out - a choking sound that could’ve been a curse or his brother’s name-) As the clearing filled with mist, I morph my chakra into a guard around my neck, overall not too fond of the idea of the Mist-assassin-nin’s typical silent killing methods thankyouverymuch.

(-He didn’t have protection on his neck. Why didn’t he have protection on his neck?) The mist is too thick and I can’t see well, so I reach out with my chakra sense. Ruto and I have spent months upon months trying to figure out exactly what we are capable of sensing. In true TitleCharacter™ fashion Ruto has a significantly greater range than I. Later on in life, with the help of Kurama and Sage Mode, he’ll be able to sense negative emotions and so on but until then he isn’t that bad off. Ruto can sense affinities based off chakra and can sense that someone (even if he can’t always tell who) is nearby and the directions that they’re coming from. Most impressively though is Naruto's ability to detect when and where a jutsu is being performed. Incredibly helpful on the battlefield.

My sensing is different. Ruto feels the chakra of the person: their spiritual and physical energies. I on the other hand seem only able to sense their spiritual energies: their soul, for a lack of a better term. Because of this I can’t gauge how powerful someone is or what their affinity is, but I can tell where someone is and who someone is based on how different their energies are.
I reach out and immediately feel the warm orange glow of Ruto’s chakra and shards surrounding me in small chunks - his shadow clones. His main body is to my right, right up next to Sasuke’s ever-moving purple. I need to stretch a little further to meet a silver sliver of Kakashi nearby, and even further his main body under the earth. But there are three more people nearby. Haku could be the unmoving ice blue figure to my left. Zabuza could be the dark navy close to Kakashi’s clone. Tazuna could be the earthy brown near the boys - but I can’t know for sure.

(-Know for sure like how I know that he is dead-)

“One by teacher clone. One in trees. One by our Heir.”

My voice seems to echo uselessly around the mist, meeting no one. (-What if they’re dead? Dead like the Brother-)

But if I strain my senses, the Kakashi clone was just dispelled leaving the navy blue - who must be Zabuza - standing still.

“Teacher clone down. Was enemy.”

That at least clears up any confusion. But I just made myself a target - the leader isn’t there, so take out the second in command.

Or who kinda seems like the second in command.

MOMOCHI ZABUZA

This was supposed to be easy. Just kill off some worthless bridge-builder and then we have enough money for the revolution against Yagura.

The Demon Brothers being defeated was unexpected; they had the element of surprise, and the builder shouldn’t have had enough money in order to buy anyone really worth worrying about.

But arriving to see Sharingan no Kakashi was a surprise better than what I could’ve hoped for. Ever since the damn Uchiha had died I had been just itching to fight up against a Sharingan. I had resigned to waiting until the damn Last Uchiha brat had grown up a bit, but it seems Festival Day came early.

The language that one of the blonde brat’s clones began to spout was new - spoken with enough ease to be a language, not just a code. The girl, the one with the odd appearance, had henged into the crowd of her teammates Bushins so it stood to reason that she was the source. She was the one to look out for among the bratty genin. Different languages meant different cultures. Different cultures meant different techniques. Different techniques meant being caught off guard - something he couldn’t afford to do, even with Haku in the trees as his mother-hen of a backup.

When the brat, using her teammate’s voice, called out to establish contact he didn’t think too much of it. When she called out again just after he disposed of the damn Shadow Clone then he got suspicious.

Had the damn Hatake somehow alerted her of his clone being dispelled? No, that would have alerted me of his position by proxy. Chance then? Was the timing coincidence? She seemed too sure for that.

I ghost up towards where her voice came from, and begin to dispel clone after clone, critical hit after critical hit. I dispel nearly 20 full bodied Shadow Clones (how much chakra did this kid have
before I slice at one’s neck and met unexpected resistance. Immediately I was pulled off the ‘clone’ by Hatake, distracting me from the girl.

Our fight was short but intense, ending with each of us being thrown away from each other. I landed atop the water and I could see Hatake skid to a stop near the girl who went ahead and dropped her henge in a barely audible puff.

“Sensei, 1,000 jutsu’s and you don’t know one to clear up a little bit of water?”

Hah. The cat’s got claws. And guts.

A murmur of a technique name, and the clearing is rid of my chakra mist. The two boys, black and yellow brats, have fallen back to protect my target and Hatake is standing next to a very frazzled looking girl who didn’t even come up past his hips.

She huffs in put upon annoyance, and cocks a hip. “Look, we know that you’re after Tazuna because Gato offered you money - but we also know he isn’t going to pay you.” She declares with no small level of surety.

The HELL?

By Hatake’s barely-noticeable startled glance down to his student this was new to him. What did this brat know? And why was I taking her seriously?

“What the hell are you talking about, brat?” I growl out, nerves set on edge. I shouldn’t be this worked up but I need that money for the revolution, and I can’t get it if Gato isn’t going to pay us. Even if the only evidence is some tree-hugging foreign brat.

I work to keep my emotions under control. No shinobi likes being cut out of his pay, but this brat could be messing with me. No matter how sure she sounded.

She waves a hand dismissively, as if she was just commenting on a shirt or the weather. “Oh just that it seems odd that such a miser - a greedy man - would be willing to part with enough money to pay off a powerful shinobi such as yourself. He’s skimped out on paying ronin in the past, after all.”

In the blink of an eye, I’ve got the girl’s tunic in my grip “How the hell-”

“I suggest -” Kakashi drawled out, steel in his voice “-that you release my cute little Noa-chan.”

I drop the girl - Noa - unceremoniously and she dashes a couple feet back, arming herself. At least she wasn’t completely useless.

“Lucky brat,” I bare a concealed, toothless grin at her, “But you’re not always going to have Sharingan no Kakashi to save your smart mouth.”

She shrugs, but I can see the nervousness behind the movement. She knows that I don’t fully believe her - I have no reason to.

I ready Kubikiribocho and watch as the genin radiate wariness at the well practiced movement. I feel Haku’s familiar chakra retreat towards Gato’s encampment, and I know that he’ll determine for sure whether Gato was planning on betraying us. Until then: stalling.

“Then again, maybe you’ll lose Sensei sooner rather than later.”
THE DEMON AND THE ANGEL - PART TWO

Chapter Summary

'A wave of blue chakra brighter than the sun.'

_Underlined - English_

_‘Italicised’ - thoughts_

UCHIHA SASUKE

He didn’t entirely understand why Noa was taunting the extremely dangerous missing-nin, but it was making Kakashi-sensei nervous.

Naruto leans over to him, and Sasuke had to strain his ears to hear him. “There’s someone using chakra headed away from us. I think they’re with Zabuza,” The blonde murmured lowly.

Sasuke narrowed his eyes and nodded. Noa is similar enough of a sensor that she probably knew, but Kakashi-sensei may be out of the loop. There’s nothing they could do without alerting Zabuza that they know about the other nin.

“-maybe you should lose Sensei sooner rather than later.”

And then Zabuza’s gone, moving too fast for his eyes without the Sharingan. Sasuke cursed his inability and fell in formation with Naruto’s clones to surround Tazuna, eyes peeled and wary. He caught only glimpses of the fight as time seems to drag on, a whisper of sword here, a flash of silver hair there - both jounin level nin moving too fast for my eyes to process.

Noa is somehow both independent of the fight and caught right up into it, constantly pushed back by Kakashi or forced to dodge a move from Zabuza. She’s almost like the stick two dogs are fighting over - not quite part of the fight, but more the prize of it.

Sauske had never seen her so jarred.

He can’t tell how much time has passed but the fighting figures luckily seem to have ignored their client in favor of killing each other. Who knows when we’ll next get an opportunity like this ...

“Naruto. Take the client and fall back into the city. We don’t know who that other guy is, but you can sense if he’s coming up on you. Get him away - I’ll stay here and watch their backs.”

Naruto is clearly about to protest but the Last Loyal Uchiha only levels a look at him. “I know that you want to stay here and help but we don’t know if an opportunity like this will come up again, and the client takes priority. I would do it myself, but you’ve got the clones.”

Groaning in frustration, Naruto flicks out two more clones henged to look like Tazuna, and six figures in pairs of two take off; Tazunas being dragged behind Narutos in three different directions.
As soon as all six of them are completely out of sight with a single Naruto clone left behind they turn back to the water’s edge -

Just in time to be hit by a wave of blue chakra brighter than the sun.

**NOA**

The first thing I register is sheer drain. I can’t remember ever being this low on chakra.

My head feels like cotton, and I can’t think straight through the pounding against my skull. My mouth is dry, and I vaguely register that for some reason that I’m lying on my stomach.

I attempt to raise my head - to open my eyes - and a wave of pain so intense my breath catches shoots through every part of me. Each muscle in my body feels sore and torn and my back feels so feverishly hot and burned that it must just be a lump of charcoal barely attached to my spine at this point.

I hear a grunt of pain and it takes a second for me to recognize that came from me. There’s a shuffling sound, and there are hands on my neck -

“Whoa whoa - Noa-chan. It’s okay. You’re safe.”

Safe?

The hands on my neck (checking my pulse?) turn me to my side. I painstakingly open my eyes, and through the blindingly painful light I see a lone eye. I open my mouth, but a shuddering cough wrecks my body and fuck it all it hurts -

“Shhhhh. You’re okay. It’s okay.”

I can’t tell how long we’re there, me coughing and trying to hold back my cries of pain and the hands gently holding by head steady and keeping my on my side. I may have blacked out from pain for a second, because the next thing I know I’m sat up, torso leaned into a man’s firm chest with his arm carefully holding up my shoulders.

There’s something in front of my face, and it takes a while - too long - to recognize that it’s a glass of water. I shakily raise my hand to it, and large, calloused hands help me guide it to my lips.

The water is cool, but I almost immediately choke on it as another cough tears at my throat.

“Easy there, Chibi-chan. Easy.”

I don’t know if I actually managed to drink any of it, but I feel so tired I’m already drifting off…

“Hey now.” Someone’s shaking my shoulder, “Noa. Noa, you’ve been asleep for nearly five days. You need food and water.”

I grit my teeth - why must every small motion be painful - and force my eyes open. A man - Kakashi, that’s Kakashi - is looking down at me worriedly. I didn’t realize that he even could be worried. Huh.

“There we go.” He looks relieved to see my eyes open. The cup is back against my lips and water begins to trickle down my throat. “You’ve been unconscious for nearly five days, like I said.
You’ve put the boys in quite a state.”

The cup is gone - I think I emptied it - but now there’s a spoon at my lips. “Gave us quite a scare, Noa-chan. We’re at the client’s house; the boys are with Tazuna, at the bridge.”

I flinch as Kakashi shifts how I’m seated, and I look down - trying to focus and take stock of my injuries. My legs are covered by a striped duvet up to my waist. I’m shirtless, but my dignity is preserved by bandages wrapped around my chest and back. Both arms bare except for my left hand which is bandaged.

Following my line of sight, I hear Kakashi sigh. “You got pretty beat up, both of us did. The Sharingan is quite draining. The boys had to carry the both of us back after the fight. Zabuza was wounded pretty badly and we don’t know where he went, but he could easily be alive.”

I wrack my brains, trying to find some memory of how I got this injured. We were at the village gates, and we set off with Tazuna. But then there was the puddle and -

The memory of my first kill hits me like a freight train, and I’m suddenly no longer tired.

My hand goes to my throat, and somehow I know Kakashi knows what I’m thinking about right now. “Chibi-chan. I know that you don’t want to think about that, that you’re worried about nightmares, but you need sleep. Try to get some sleep.”

I shake my head - there’s no way that I could sleep after all of that. “‘Nuff sleep. Five days,” I croak out.

I hear another sigh, “I thought you would be like that.”

He sounded so resigned, and I hear a clack of him putting down the spoon. I look up at him but there’s a surge of chakra at the base of my neck and -

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**HATAKE KAKASHI**

I remove my hand from Noa’s neck. Strictly speaking, I shouldn’t have used that jutsu outside of a combat situation but Noa deserved to get another peaceful couple hours without nightmares.

I look down at the fragile, broken little girl in my arms and I can’t quite equate brash little Noa-chan with her. Noa always had so much bravado, so much spirit, and hearing her whimper like the child she was was shattering.

Even unconscious she seems troubled, the extent of her injuries no doubt still paining her. Supporting her head I lay her on her right side, pillows on either side to prop her up and support her hand.

“Only you, Noa-chan, would stop one of the Seven Swordsmen’s swords with your own hand.”
Chapter Summary

Tsubasa - the girl. She's a Tsubasa.

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

HAKU

“Tsubasa.”

I turn around to Master Zabuza, heart lifting. I had been so worried - he had been unconscious for days after the fight against the Copy-nin and that strange girl with the odd chakra. He coughs, and I gently remove the bandages from his neck and face.

After a few minutes, his breathing steadies and I help him sit up in his wounded state.

“The girl,” He croaks, his voice sounding like a rusty kunai. “The girl is a damn Tsubasa!”

I gently pass him a cup of water, and try and remember if I had ever heard that name before.

“Tsubasa? Is that a position or a clan?”

Master Zabuza drains and unceremoniously drops the cup, and runs a tired hand over his face. “A clan. That way of manipulating chakra, how she stopped my sword. Only a Tsubasa could do that.”

I feel my eyes widen, and I fight to keep a level expression on my face. “She stopped your sword?”

I had been forced to return and retrieve Zabuza from the water after an extremely large flare of chakra brought me back to the fight but I had thought it was Hatake, not the girl.

Master Zabuza makes a sound that could’ve been a bark of laughter if he wasn’t so injured, “Sure did. The Tsubasa brat coated her hand in enough physical chakra to block my attack, though the blood on Kubikiribocho shows that she didn’t know what she was doing.”

He has another coughing fit, and I hand him the cup again, refilled with an herbal remedy. As he begins to drink the rather bitter medicine, I break the news. “It’s true. Gato wasn’t planning on paying us.”

He looks up at me sharply, and I know what he was going to ask even without him needing to voice it. “I didn’t kill him, didn’t tip him off. I believed it was best to tend to your recovery without any goons or grunts interfering. Plus, we are now able to enact any revenge further than just killing him.”

He grins, beautiful and dangerous shark teeth exposed to the world, and I feel something flutter in
my chest. “Good job Haku.”

The praise makes this entire, horrible situation worth it, and something in the back of my mind wants me to find and thank that Tsubasa girl.

UCHIHA SASUKE

The first thing I think the moment I walk into the client's house is that something is different. I scan the foyer, but there’s nothing. I check the kitchen, and Tsunami is cooking dinner. Normal. Inari isn’t home. Also normal.

I turn to Naruto, and I can tell that we both know that something is off. I turn and scan the room slowly, and I know that the change is going to eat at me until -

“Nee-chan.” Naruto gasps slightly in realization.

I wrack my brains, going over what we’d seen again, and come to the same conclusion.

“The tray for her dinner -”

“- is empty!”

I will deny any accusations of using chakra enhanced steps to get me to the guest room any faster than normal.

Naruto and I burst in neck in neck, and both immediately have Kakashi’s hands on the backs of our shirts. Then, just as fast as we entered the room, we were thrown out of it.

Massaging my bruised tailbone, I scowl up at Kakashi as he exits the room, carefully sliding the rice paper door closed after him. He squats down at our level and gives us an eye smile. “Maa maa, boys. Don’t want to wake her up.”

I can feel my eyes nearly bug out of my head and Naruto doesn’t look much better. He begins to sputter before he can form coherent words. “But - wha-? I don’t -” He rockets off loudly.

Kakashi’s hand shoots out and covers Naruto’s mouth, effectively shutting him up. After Naruto goes silent, Sensei quirks his visible eyebrow at him and removes his hand.

“But sensei!” Naruto exclaims in a much quieter voice. “She’s been asleep for almost a week! Why wouldn’t we want to wake her up?”

Another eye smile (when Noa wakes up, she and Naruto need to get him back for all of this condescension. Homework and pranks for months) so I think on everything Kakashi-sensei said - doing what Noa said we should do and think about why he said what he said ... and it hits me.

“She already woke up. You said not to wake her but she had been asleep for so long it wasn’t healthy. But her food tray was empty so she woke up!”

Another one of those damn eye smiles shows me that I was right. Naruto looks between me and Kakashi and he jumps up on his feet. “How is she? She eat everything, right? So she’s got energy? Did she drink? Is her hand okay? Is her back okay? Why can’t we see her? Will she wake up soon? What are we going to do?”
So much for being quiet? At least he started off quiet - despite his voice rising.

Kakashi holds up his hands in a placating gesture, “Maa maa my cute genin, you really should calm down. Chibi-chan is okay; I checked her over, and all of her wounds are healing nicely. I used a jutsu commonly used for trauma patients to give her a couple hours of mostly painless sleep. She’ll be out for a bit longer now."

Naruto and I let out simultaneous sighs of relief, and we exchange glances. Kakashi is being more open than usual, so …

Naruto is the one to actually ask, his nerves clear in his voice. “Kakashi-sensei? What happened to Noa? We couldn’t see - all that chakra was too bright - but whatever it was knocked out Zabuza and threw him into the water. And then Noa was chakra depleted!”

Kakashi studies us both carefully, and then goes from his squat to sitting cross legged in front of us, settling in for a long talk. He looks carefully between the both of us, and seems to make up his mind about something. “Do you trust me?”

I sit back on my heels at the non sequitur, and exchange glances again with Naruto. What was this about?

“What is this about, Kakashi-sensei? ‘Course we trust you?” Naruto questions, echoing my thoughts.

Kakashi just levels his serious, one-eyed gaze at both of us again, “Do you trust me with Noa?”

The silence is heavy and still, but my mind is reeling.

Do I trust him with Noa?

Noa trusts him. Hell, Noa thinks that he was the best sensei we could’ve gotten. She taught him English and actually talks around him. She loved - loves - Team 7. But do I trust him?

I sit cross legged, mirroring sensei, and can feel Naruto’s gaze on me. He wants me to answer.

“Yes.”

I will trust you with my friend. My … family.

Kakashi-sensei nods once, satisfied, and runs a hand over his covered eye. “Since you trust me, tell me what you know about Noa’s family.”

Ignoring again the strangeness of the question yet again, I think back on what I know and turn to Naruto. He looks confused, just as confused as I feel, but answers just the same. “She lived with her aunt here in Konoha but she doesn’t think she was born here. Her aunt was unmarried, and had no kids. Her aunt never really talked about her parents, but did kinda allude to not really liking them much. ‘Cuz they left her. Her aunt died when she was four.”

I glance at Kakashi and nod; that was all I knew myself. He hums thoughtfully and sits back, slouching against the wall. “What you saw in the clearing was a kekkei genkai.”

Silence.

“I’m sorry what?”

“Nee-chan has a bloodline limit?”
In lieu of a response, Kakashi turned to me. “Have you ever heard of the Tsubasa clan?”

I blink, “Yes? I thought they died out.”

“So what are the Tsubasa? Sasuke-teme! Kakashi-sensei! What are you talking about? Who are the Tsubasa?”

Kakashi sighs again, “Naruto, volume. The Tsubasa were one of the oldest and most powerful clans since well before the establishment of the villages. They died out not unlike the Uchiha; they were growing rapidly and they were massacred leaving a small number of survivors. The Nations thought that they were all dead, their numbers dwindling with time, until cute little Noa-chan.”

My heart thuds in my chest. I can’t think.

Naruto looks confused, “So that light - all that chakra - it was because of her family? What kind of kekkei genkai did the Tsubasa have? Do you know?”

I think back, trying to remember but come up with nothing through the fog of not unlike the Uchiha, “I can’t remember anything from what is in the Uchiha records…”

“Only rumors.” Kakashi says evasively.

“You’re not going to tell us anything concrete, are you?” I deadpan, trying to get back onto firmer ground.

“Nope!”

That damn eye smile -

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NOA

Waking up for the second time hurt less.

I didn’t immediately move - I’d learned that lesson - but instead took the time to sort through my head. The fight with Zabuza was … how did it even go?

Kakashi and Zabuza were playing cat and mouse … and I was stuck in the middle.

Haku left to find Gato.

Naruto sent clones and his real body out to get Tazuna to safety …

But what did I do?

I created a … I created a shield. Out of chakra - to protect myself during the fight. My back had felt … hot?

My back had felt hot.

But then Kubikiribocho was coming towards me - I dodged. But Kakashi was behind me! So I -

What did I do? I coated my hand in chakra? Right?

Like Chidori or Rasengan … I made a gauntlet and grabbed the blade. It was instinct -
But Kakashi was knocked down somehow - but unhurt.

I knocked him down so he’d be out of the line of fire.

But how did...?

My back.

Something about my back knocked him down.

Then I ... I forced him back.

I forced Zabuza into the water and he turned to come back to attack again and then -

Something inside me *snapped* -

And then nothing.

How could I remember nothing?

My head hurts again - why does everything *hurt*?

I’m -

I’m laid on my side this time.

There are pillows on either side of me keeping me held upright - supporting my hand.

I should have just enough chakra in my system to sense who’s around me ...

*Pain* lances through my body so hot and sharp my breathing stops and my heart stutters. I must have let out some sound of pain because soon there are gloved hands holding me steady as I get my breath back.

I feel feverish - more feverish than before - and I flinch when I feel the chill of foreign chakra snake through my system. The grip on me tightens and the burning feeling lessens as I feel the chakra gradually leave.

“Noa. I know that you feel helpless but you can’t use your chakra right now. Your systems are damaged right now and I only know some basic medical jutsu, nothing on this scale. Okay?”

Kakashi is the one holding me, then, so I nodded shakily and I feel his grip loosen on me. I struggle to find the energy to speak, but he cuts me off just as I open my mouth. “You were asleep for 6 hours but you should’ve slept longer. Even if the boys are worried.”

I nod again weakly, and work to open my eyes. The sun is bright, and I have to squint to see where we are. I don’t remember enough of the last time I was awake to be able to say whether it was the same room but I recognize the same feel of a duvet over my legs.

Seeing my eyes open, Kakashi frowns through his mask and places a hand over my eyes. “You need sleep, Noa-chan,” He states, but without the piercing early morning light I’m already drifting off again.
Chapter Summary

The battle - and the hospital.

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

It was on the seventh day after Team 7 had arrived in Wave that Gato ordered the strike on the bridge.

Unfortunately for the drug tycoon, however, Zabuza and Haku's assault on Team 7 was a front as both former Mist Nin had carefully spent the week carefully planning for the perfect opportunity to kill Gato: for the prideful and diminutive man never could sit backseat. After all, killing a man, however powerful, is far easier in the open.

Had Noa been there to witness the fight, she would've marveled at how very similar yet completely different the fight she vaguely remembered from her first life was to what took place that day. The morning of the seventh day saw Sasuke unlock his Sharingan in order to save Naruto (although this time not from his own rash stupidity). And when Sasuke fell to Haku's precisely aimed senbon, Naruto released a wave of Kurama's chakra so potent and pure that even Kakashi was knocked back by the force of it.

One, or perhaps two, striking differences however were the fates of Haku and Zabuza.

Noa would later speculate to herself on what exactly saved Haku from throwing himself in front of Kakashi's Chidori. Perhaps it was because his fight against Naruto and Sasuke was more challenging in this time, or maybe it was because Gato's betrayal had brought to light the importance of Zabuza having someone to watch his back. Regardless, Haku did not throw himself in the path of Kakashi's Chidori.

However, without Haku there, the Copy-nin's jutsu aimed true and that the sound of tearing flesh accompanied the call of a thousand birds that echoed across the bridge in the ominously quiet morning air.

Luckily, Zabuza was nothing if not resilient and the glancing, although deep, gouge across his ribs did little to stop him in the face of revenge. And so medical aid waited as he and a newly allied Kakashi decimated Gato's mercenary forces. Mere moments passed before Zabuza had, quite literally, retrieved Gato’s head.

With their revenge carried out Zabuza and Haku were quite passive. The Demon of the Mist even apologized quite amicably (although brashly) to Tazuna for trying for his life. After Tazuna gave an incredibly confused, still wary, acception of his apology the nukenin turned to the tense Sharingan Kakashi.
"The little brat - what's her name?"

Kakashi eyed him worriedly, glancing back to where Naruto was helping Haku gently remove the needles from his - blissfully alive - Uchiha of a student.

"Noa." Kakashi allowed, reluctantly. "No clan name."

Zabuza made a face that on anyone else would be an incredulously raised eyebrow but on his hairless forehead was a bit ... odd. "Sure - I believe that. Tell Tsubasa Noa that she saved our asses and that once we clean up the Bloody Mist, she's welcome to stop by anytime and start up the Tsubasa Clan in Kiri for us."

And with a final laugh at Kakashi’s incredulous and disgusted expression and a quiet signal to his apprentice the Kiri-nin were gone.

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**NOA**

The third time I remember coming to consciousness I’m somewhere different. I opened my eyes and everything seems to be fuzzy. Reaching out with my senses is useless, and through the fog in my brain I can’t tell if the sting of antiseptic in my nose is real or not.

With entirely too much effort, I pry open my eyes and take in where I was. Blinking my eyes into focus I find that I’m in a hospital room, or at least medical facility. I catalog my injuries and find nothing out of place other than an IV leading to a rather alarmingly large bag above my bedside table.

I sit up painfully slowly, and feel a type of soreness I had never experienced before, like the feeling of sleeping in too long multiplied hundred-fold. I’m barely an inch above the standard issued mattress before a flare of pain races down my back leaving me gasping.

I don’t know how long it took me to be sitting upright against my headboard, possibly hours, possibly seconds, but it makes me silently curse Zabuza to the seven circles of hell up and down in Common and English alike. My processing speed is still painfully slow, and after putting a thorough amount of effort into it I connect my IV to the fuzziness.

They fucking drugged me. Goddamn.

Without ceremony, I reach over and firmly grasp the line and -

There’s a hand on my hand, prying my fingers away. A big hand - when did that hand get here? "Easy there, Noa-chan. You’re safe, we’re back in Konoha."

I blink up at the face - or rather mask - of Kakashi-sensei, and even drugged I can see how worn he looks. I attempt to speak - to ask what happened, how I got here - but my vocal cords protest loudly and painfully, coughing and croaking with the best of them.

“Easy there, Noa-chan,” Kakashi repeats, a touch of strained humor in his voice. “Those wind pipes haven’t been used for a while, give ‘em a break.”

I nod and close my eyes, focusing on easing my breathing into a steady rhythm. As I opened my eyes again, there’s a glass of water held carefully near me. I reach out and for what feels like the
hundredth time Kakashi helps me drink.

Once the cup is drained and placed silently on the bedside table, Kakashi looks over his shoulder at the door. He turns back to me, the visible space between his eyes creased in worry, and grips my hand gently.

“Noa-chan. It’s late right now, but you need a couple people to look at you now that you’re awake. I’m going to go get them, okay?”

I feel confused, and I’m sure that it shows on my face, but I nod carefully and watch as Kakashi strolls out of the ward entirely too casual to be natural.

NARA SHIKAKU

The moment that Hatake chakra enters the waiting room, I feel Inoichi tense beside me. I turn from my frankly troublesome pile of jounin salary papers to see Hatake in a state of such extreme lazy casualness that it puts even the Nara to shame.

And it’s patently fake.

Kakashi was a tough man to read: he was a battle of opposition. Occasionally the elite jounin was straightforward, relations natural and genuine, but most of the time the man was polar. The more interested he was, the less interested he looked. The more angry he was, the more casual he acted. And the more worried he was, the lazier he acted.

“She’s awake.”

Even his voice, lazy and detached, was worried, in his own way.

I turn to Inoichi and Mesuji, the head medic of the hospital, and arch an eyebrow.

“Well then,” I drawl, mimicking Kakashi’s false tone. “We better go see her.”

When the four of us plus the recently summoned Sandaime reach Noa’s room, she was just on the edge of consciousness. I note the sizeable dosage of intravenous medication she was receiving and arc an eyebrow at Mesuji.

The severe woman merely narrows her eyes and cocks a shoulder. “She’s an unknown.”

I nod, once and sharply, before turning my attention back to my son’s closest friend outside of his team. Her eyes are dilated, and she blinks slowly and often; attempting to regain focus with minimal results. She hasn’t seemed to have noticed us, despite our relatively unmasked entrance. We all hang back as Mesuji approaches Noa carefully, eyeing the empty glass of water next to her.

“Good, she’s drunk something.” Mesuji comments absentmindedly, eyes scanning Noa’s chart at the foot of her bed.

Noa doesn’t respond to the medic’s voice, and I can feel Kakashi’s worry radiating off him in waves. He must be seriously preoccupied to let this much emotion show.
Inochi shifts, turning to the younger jounin, “She this out of it when you were here?”

It takes a second for Kakashi to respond, and when he does his voice is low and tight. “Yes. I walked in as she was sitting up, and she didn’t seem to realize I was there until I kept her from ripping her IV out.”

We all turn back to the matter at hand just as Mesuji carefully reaches out and takes Noa’s wrist in her grip, running a diagnostic jutsu with a low flare of chakra. Noa is finally seemingly pulled out of her head and she blinks slowly up at the five of us, small and frail in her bed.

Her free hand twitches in a shallow mockery of a wave, and I approach the bedside across from Mesuji to grip it in my hand gently. I carefully watch her expressions as she slowly takes in Mesuji removing her IV (as well as she can in her heavily medicated state), then me, and then the three shinobi at the foot of her bed. Her eyebrows scrunch minutely, and I can practically see the little genin trying to work through why there would be so many important and powerful people in the hospital room of a no-name orphan, kunoichi or no.

I let her try and work it out, knowing that despite her status as a genius drugs can be a substantial handicap, and turn to signal to my teammate.

In an instant he is next to me, and in another our positions are reversed. Noa doesn’t even register the change, and react only by shifting her gaze when Inochi places his hand on the side of her neck, chakra flaring.

Noa stiftens, eyes wide, and what little focus her eyes had is gone in an instant. She slumps but Kakashi is there, swooping in and cradling her to his chest as he follows the Sandiame to the door.

I draw even with the jounin-sensei and reach over with two fingers, closing Noa’s eyes gently.
Chapter Summary

With a flare of chakra and a 'KAI' suddenly I'm more aware than I've been since we left Konoha.

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - thoughts

NOA

With a flare of chakra and a ‘KAI’ and suddenly I’m the most aware I’ve been since we left Konoha.

Which we are back in now. Right. Thinking is so much easier now that I’ve managed to burn the drugs out of my system.

A slight shift, a jolt of pain. “Man, I have got to stop waking up in so much pain.” I croak out, eyes closed. No, bad Noa. Talking isn’t a good idea. Bad, bad idea.

My eyes flutter open, and I’m no longer in a medical ward but a large, featureless room. I’m laid down on the hard stone in a pair of pants and a hospital gown - the kind with an open back, and I can feel the grit of dirt or dust against my still-raw back.

And I’m not alone.

“What did she say?”

Was that the Sandaime Hokage?

“That she needs to stop waking up in so much pain.”

Okay. Kakashi I can deal with.

“Sassy one isn’t she?”

Don’t know that voice, a woman. She’s out of my field of vision.

“She may have picked that up from my daughter.”

Mr. Yamanaka. I think I remember him being in my room.

“Or Ino picked it up from her.”

Mr. Nara. Okay. I definitely remember him being there, he squeezed my hand.

No one does anything for a long moment, and I decide that laying on the ground is the dumbest thing ever. I can’t think of any injuries that would stop me from sitting up - other than my stupid back - so I brace down my forearms and force myself up.
My gasp of pain echoes through the room, but I’m sat upright and that’s all that matters. (I decided to ignore the woman’s - was that the head medic? - muttering about reckless patients.) As soon as the bolts of pain finish destroying my back, I look up and am suddenly face to face with the God of Shinobi.

I blink and try not to react - and fail spectacularly. “Sandaime-sama?” I question, half confusion and half greeting, jerking back slightly - and painfully. The man in front of me is more stoic than even when we first met and he thought I was a plant to get to Ruto.

Good times.

“Noa,” He greets back, voice level and emotionless. “Do you know why you’re here?”

The question throws me off, and I have to work to form a response. “Ummm. ‘Cuz I got hurt after taunting Zabuza of the Mist with information I shouldn’t really have?” I croak out, wincing at how disused my voice sounds.

The Hokage doesn’t react to what I said, and simply keeps his very dangerous gaze on me. I’m too afraid to break eye contact, so I start to babble - no matter how much it hurts my cords.

When in doubt, make them underestimate you. Great tip for child soldiers. Got me this far.

“Um … Well I know that taunting a missing nin is a bad idea I kinda had an excuse cuz I was in the shinobi bar - I know that I wasn’t supposed to be but I needed to find Anko cuz she told me that if I didn’t return her borrowed trench coat as soon as possible then she’d turn me inside out and I really have to take whatever that woman says seriously - and I realized that drunk shinobi can be really easy to eavesdrop on and there was this gaggle of chunin and they were just sitting there talking about their last mission and I didn’t catch all of it but they were talking about how so much of the Wave was in shambles and there was some sleezy psudo-dictator called Gato who was scamming a bunch of merchants and mercenaries left and right so I was like ‘Huh, might as well look into that cuz you never know what you’re going to run into and -’”

I cut off sharply when the Sandaime holds up a single hand, and I swallow nervously. His mask finally breaks, and he treats me to a grandfatherly smile. The KI that I didn’t even realize he was giving off is suddenly gone and I can breathe again.

When he speaks, his voice is warm. “I’m sorry for the suspicion, Noa. We didn’t expect you to be so observant - we apologize for underestimating you. However, that isn’t why you’re here, Noa-chan.”

Oh. I was under suspicion. ‘Underestimating’ me my ass, they thought that I was an imposter or a sleeper agent or something.

Underestimation for the win. Please don’t kill me.

Babbling, keeps you alive, man.

“Noa-chan. Do you remember ever getting injured on your back?”

I blink at the familiarity of the question, and my gaze darts to where Kakashi is standing stiffly next to Ino’s dad. “My back hurts right now.” I admit, thinking back. “But other than that, not really. Maybe a kick or bruise, nothing really debilitating - I mean serious.”

The Sandaime nods carefully, but his face in inscrutable. “Noa-chan, you have two scars on your back.”
“I’m sorry, what?”

Another little smile, but then he’s serious again. “Noa-chan, you have two fifteen centimeter long scars running parallel to each other between your shoulder blades.”

One blink. Two.

“When the hell did I get that?”

I’m thinking back on both of my lives, trying to figure out where two scars like that could’ve come from, when I realize the Sandaime is still speaking, “- family.”

I mentally shake myself, and shift into a loose cross legged seated position. “Huh?” I question numbly. “Didn’t catch that. Shocking revelation and all.”

Ever patient, the Hokage starts again. “We believe that the marks on your back are a sign of a Kekkei Genkai, a bloodline limit that was passed down through your family.”

A Kekkei Genkai - the fucking hell?

Wasn’t a reincarnation into the world of plant people and demons and goddesses with rabbit horns not dramatic enough on top of a random added genetic super power?!?

Cool it, Noa.

I think back. When I was born in this world, I thought at first that it was just one big trippy dream. I was two by the time that I drew the parallels between the Naruto books and the world I was living in.

I never knew the woman who bore me in this world as she kinda ‘succumbed to illness’ - kicked it, I didn’t care about niceties - after giving birth to me, and I wouldn’t know what to think of her if I did meet her. She was from out of clan and as I grew, the family that I was born into spared me no love. They were a small, traditional clan that lived in a village a few clicks from Konoha. They were disgusted by how foreign I looked, and thought me the devil child because of the language that I spoke - they barely fed me and eventually just fired the nanny they had hired for me. Akimi was the only person who I cared for at that point, really.

Did they have a bloodline limit? Was that why they were disgusted by me? My mother was from out of clan, did they think she cheated on my father? So were disgusted that I could never inherit the limit?

Didn’t excuse them being assholes, but that does make them - maybe - the tiniest bit more understandable. Like, a modicum of understanding. But it’s still there.

But what was their name? C’mon Noa, you lived with them for three years before you finally cut loose. Tsunami? Tusnaba? Tsubai? No, it was -

“Tsubasa?”

I feel four sets of eyes and one eye bore into me, and I realize that I spoke out loud.

Shit.

Mr. Yamanaka draws level with the Sandaime, and squats down to my eye level. A thrill of fear runs through me, but I know that he would never enter my mind without permission if there was
another option.

I hope.

“Noa-chan,” He asks, voice gentle. “Where did you hear that name?”

Shit shit shit shit shit .

I gulp, and decide to keep as close to the truth as I could. “I dunno. I think I heard it as a kid? I dunno why I remembered it just now.”

He nods, seemingly taking what I was saying at face value. After all, the Noa they knew had no reason to lie. Lucky me. “Do you remember anything about the Tsubasa? They’re a clan - an ancient one that we thought all died out.”

“All died out?”

The words tumble out of my mouth before I realize what I could be giving away, but my present paranoid company seem to chalk it up to my nerves and the situation. It is the Sandaime who answers me. “In the Warring Clans Era the Tsubasa resided in a small village to the east of what is now Konoha, but were nearly completely killed off as collateral in the Uchiha-Senju conflict. The survivors joined the Land of Lightning, but more recently were killed in a mass assassination of the surviving descendents by Kumogakure some years ago, who they defected from.

Holy shit. Those bastards were dead.

Thank fucking god.

“No. I think I only heard Auntie mention them once or twice, and always with something negative to say about how much they valued blood purity.”

More like what I thought about them, but oh well. At least the jounin in the room look unsurprised.

“So I’m a Tsubasa?” At least Team 7 can be a collective group of shinobi that belong to clans that don’t exist anymore. I was happy with how I was now, I don’t want any bloodlines from people who didn’t care about me to define who I was now.

Kakashi gives me a semi-genuine eye smile, but I can feel the tension radiating off of him. Was this some kind of big deal? It just meant that I had a power up, right?

Something on the wall catches my eye, and as I look more properly around the room I realize that there are a bunch of seals on the walls and that the door is locked sturdily shut.

Trying to hide my nerves from my voice, I dare to ask. “So if I was just hurt because of using my bloodline incorrectly, then why am I here - with…” I do a quick headcount, “A kage, my jounin-sensei, the head medic, jounin commander, and the head of T&I?”

Shikaku’s lips twitch, and Inoichi’s shoulders loosen, just a bit, at my casual use of humor but it’s the head medic - Mesuji? - who answers me.

“It’s because your bloodline is out of control and it’s killing you.”
Chapter Summary

Dying takes longer than many think it does.

**Underlined - English**

‘*Italicised*’ - thoughts

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**UZUMAKI NARUTO**

We had never seen Kakashi-sensei so serious.

We were at the bridge in Training Ground 3. Where we had our bell test. Where we fought for Nee-chan’s right to stay in Konoha. Where we taught Kakashi-sensei how to speak and write English. Where the four of us, Team 7, would always meet.

But Nee-chan wasn’t here. And Kakashi-sensei actually showed up on time.

I didn’t dare to ask what happened, how Nee-chan was. I was afraid that if I asked *and got an answer* then the worst would become a reality. The Bastard seemed to feel the same way, because when Sensei showed up, we just stared, silent.

“Maa. I thought you should hear it from me.”

Silence. I’m barely breathing. I fight to catch my breath. I struggle to find words. “You don’t mean that -”

“She’s alive,” Kakashi cut in smoothly, but his voice is still grim. “But she’s recovering. There were … complications.”

He pauses, and this image of our cool, awesome sensei with amazing jutsu worried about our teammate is scarier than it should be. “Noa woke up -” I let out a breath I didn’t realize I was holding, and I hear Sasuke mirror it beside me. “- and she was able to confirm that she does have family in the Tsubasa clan, although she doesn’t know how she is related or how the Kekkei Genkai works.”

The air is heavy.

“That’s what the problem is, isn’t it?” Sasuke cuts through the tension as if with a kunai, “She doesn’t know how to use her new Kekkei Genkai and it’s hurting her.”

A single tense nod from Kakashi-sensei and I’m up and pacing and thinking at a mile an hour. I don’t even realize that I’m babbling -

“Nee-chan has always been *especially good at molding her chakra* - she uses it for her *tricks* -
which could either be part of the bloodline limit or just part of her talent because she was so able to think outside of the box. She never really said that she felt like only she could do it, but no one else has really tried - and she can do normal jutsu fine - so it’s not like we know that only she can do her tricks.

“She was somehow to stop a blow of a sword - but she must’ve done that by making armor out of her chakra. She’s done minor things like that before so it’s not that weird - so that covers her hand injury - and we saw that her back was injured - but Kakashi-sensei has basic healing abilities, so cuts would’ve been easy to fix. We weren’t rushing her home or to any medic so she didn’t have any internal injuries, and anything serious with her back would’ve paralyzed her.

“The bandages covered a lot of her back, so whatever hurt her was something that affected a large area. And that chakra burst wave thing - maybe a chakra burn? But Noa-nee-san has so much control over her chakra - so she lost control of it somehow -”

“Naruto -” Kakashi-sensei’s voice brings me back, and I stop pacing. He’s eyeing me with something I can’t identify in his eyes, but I don’t care enough to put any real effort in figuring him out right now. “Yes, you are right. From what we can tell about Noa-chan’s bloodline limit, it’s affecting her chakra control.”

I sit down heavily, and Sasuke reaches out to squeeze my arm. I know that he’s just as stressed as I am but that he’s being still so long just means that he’s simmering and he’s going to burst if he doesn’t spar someone soon. I sigh heavily, and gesture half-heartedly for Kakashi to continue.

“Noa-chan’s tricks are part of her bloodline. The Tsubasa were well known for two things: their ability to manifest chakra physically and their creativity, which was just as much part of their bloodline as their chakra molding. Often their civilians were artisans and scientists and we’ve seen this all in Noa, even if she isn’t a full blooded Tsubasa.

“The Tsubasa creativity combined with their ability to manipulate chakra made them versatile, but that’s not well known. We only know this much because the hospital’s head medic worked with a Tsubasa that emigrated to Konoha years ago only to later die in the war.

What made the Tsubasa famous was their wings.”

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**NARA YOSHINO**

I, Nara Yoshino - Lady of the Nara Clan, love my husband. I love my son. And I know the both of them better than I know myself.

So when Shikaku came home with the same grim look he had when he had to tell Inoichi that Neoki was in labor and that it wasn’t looking good, I was immediately on guard. After sixteen years of marriage, we had to exchange no words before I silently pointed him out back, where Shikamaru was napping after coming back from a day of D - Ranks.

I followed after his sure footsteps, and watched as he sat down by our son to gently shake him awake. I lurk in the doorway, knowing that Shikaku wouldn’t share anything with Shika-chan that I couldn’t hear.

Shikamaru may have not been a very social butterfly, but he was a shinobi - if only just a genin - and in that way he could read people, like a true Nara. So the moment that his eyes were fully
open, he was sat straight up, eyes locked on his father’s grim face.

“What happened?” He demanded, worry etched in every line of his body language.

Shikaku kept his body language calm in contrast to Shika-chan’s tense. He brought in a cautious breath, and his voice was deceptively steady. “Two weeks ago, Team 7’s C-Rank was bumped up to an A-Rank.”

Shika-chan’s seemed to go reeling, and began to curse extensively both in Common and the odd tongue that his little shogi friend Noa-chan used sometimes with him.

Wait. Noa-chan -

She was on Team 7. With … Hatake Kakashi, Uzumaki Naruto, and Uchiha Sasuke: the Kyuubi Jinchuuriki and the Last Uchiha.

Kushina and Mikoto’s children.

I was brought out of my thoughts as Shika-chan cut off a particularly creative curse sharply, turning about face to stare down at his father. “You wouldn’t have brought this up unless it was serious. You wouldn’t have brought this up with me unless it had something to do with Noa. You would’ve just told me if she was injured or dying or dead-” He choked out the last word, but forged on ahead, “- so that means that there’s a problem. And it would take time to fix, or else you would just have me wait it out. **What is wrong with Noa?**”

Shikaku keeps his steady gaze on Shikamaru, but our son doesn’t falter.

Kami. He really loves that girl.

They would make such cute babies together - if she made it out of whatever this mess was, of course.

“Noa-chan fully activated a bloodline limit that we didn’t know she had on the mission, and did so in order to save the lives of her comrades. The limit allows her to manifest her chakra physically and then recycle it, returning it to her system through her tenketsu, primarily in her hands. She has been doing for years and it explains her tricks and her rather unheard of chakra endurance.”

He pauses, checking to see that despite Shika-chan’s current distressed state he was still following along. “However, fully manifested, her Kekkei Genkai is more extreme. Her clan, the Tsubasa, were able to physically manifest chakra that they built up in their backs, similar to a Yin-seal, and release them into powerful wings made entirely out of chakra.”

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**TSUBASA NOA**

“So the scars on my back are a failed Yin-seal? And when my instinct was to release all of my chakra to make these wings-” and wasn’t that a crazy thought “- there were no seals to draw from, so it went to my normal reserves and drained those instead?”

Inoichi nods once, and I collapse back onto the rough ground.

“**Holy. Shit.**”
I scrub at my eyes, and think back to the last hour. Or two. Or three. I didn’t honestly know how long I’d been in this room, only that I’d had test after test run on my chakra systems and my blood and my mental stability - and it sucked.

The Sandaime seems sympathetic at least, and even was kind enough to pretend not to listen as Inoichi picked apart my relationships with everyone for the sake of science.

Or health.

Or something.

“That’s why we had to bring you down here for the tests, Noa-chan,” He explained in his incredibly creepy grandfather - y way. “This room is beneath the Hokage Mountain and out of the way of pretty much anyone. If we were to push chakra into your system and provoke some sort of reaction, we didn’t want any collateral.”

I nod again, and force my too-tired body back into a decent-looking sitting position. I sigh and run through the day in my head, trying to think if I had missed something.

Then I remembered what had initially freaked me out enough to consent to these tests (which I was 99.999999999999999% sure were going to be used to try and expand on the most assuredly growing file on ‘Who The Fuck This Kid Even Is.’ So much for patient confidentiality): the imminent threat of death.

“So you said these seals - or really the lack of ‘em - is killing me. Why?”

It’s Mesuji who answers, and her voice takes on that medical edge used when explaining to patients’ families exactly how long their children have to live (encouraging, to say the least). “Your chakra reserves are actually far better than we originally thought; your coils are capable of holding chakra levels of a high chunin or low jounin. However, your body was naturally trying to force your chakra into the joints on your back for your wings and since you aren’t a full blooded Tsubasa, the chakra only damaged your skin and left marks behind, marks that look like kunai cuts.

“The failed attempts at creating the Yin-seals didn’t affect you much before, you trained enough to compensate for your handicap, but the problem comes now that you have your wings activated. They’re like a Sharingan: they may be deactivated, but they’re never really gone. Your body wants to now be able to build up that chakra, faster and without as much strain now that you have your wings, but the chakra is flowing out without being stored. That may not sound like a problem, it will slowly chip away at and ultimately drain your stores. Even faster if you continue to use your chakra in the way you were before.”

Well shit -

MAITO GAI

I have not felt so unYouthful for years. It truly is a sad day for Konoha to have Noa-hasu suffer so. My Eternal Rival had gathered myself, Umino Iruka, Anko, and Ibiki-san all atop the Hokage monument to give us the unYouthful news.

Anko is agitated. Ibiki-san has become cold-faced. Umino-san looks ill.
Anko, of course, her Youth has always come out faster and louder than many others, is the first to speak.

“You mean to tell us -” she nearly shouts, bearing down on my Rival (who looks just as unYouthful as I feel) “That unless Noa manages to learn how to artificially replicate a bloodline limit Yin-Sea she will fucking die?”

“Yes, Anko.” My Eternal Rival sighs, and I have not seen him so defeated since before he joined ANBU. “Luckily, her career as a shinobi is not necessarily over. If she stops using chakra altogether, then she’ll have at least another three years, and Gai’s student Lee has proven that shinobi don’t have to use chakra. She’s close to having the taijutsu ability to back that kind of career shift up.”

Umino-san speaks softly, and it holds no youth. “How are the boys taking it? Naruto? Sasuke? Shikamaru?”

Somehow, Kakashi’s shoulders seem to slump even further, and he closes his one eye. “I told the boys a couple hours ago; they’re sparing it out. It hasn’t really fully hit them yet. Shikaku was there when she woke up and we confirmed her heritage, he’s filling in his son.”

Silence.

Surprisingly it was Ibiki-san who speaks to break it. “So what are you going to do about it?” And with a Youthful fire in his eyes and an unparalleled passion in his soul, my Eternal Rival speaks.

“Everything I fucking can.”
"I am. Not. Dead."

Adrenaline pumps through me, filling the void that my chakra left me. It’s there - I can feel it - but if I were to use what little I had I would be digging my own grave.

Well, sooner than I expected.

It’s still tempting though, to feel the rush of power flowing through my veins, to create with only a thought.

Huh. Guess that magic is more like a drug than I realized. Go figure.

YAY WITHDRAWL~!

I dodge Lee’s punch, and dip around to block a kick before I push into his space. He tenses, then deliberately relaxes his abdominals so I don’t crack a rib with my elbow-thrust into his torso.

I’ve been avoiding them, I know. My boys. But I can’t help it. Gai, Kakashi, Ruto, even Sasuke - all they see when they look at me now is my name etched on a tombstone. They don’t say anything, they try and act like nothing’s wrong, but for ninja they’re very bad at keeping their emotions hidden.

So I spar with Lee; he doesn’t know the full extent. Only that my chakra system got shot and now I need to compensate. Plus being around this much Gai-ness without the added tears and sympathy makes me think of simpler times and miss them.

I mourn not being able to do more in this world but I have these last three years to do what I can. I’ve been writing, in a code I boredly developed in math class in my past life, everything I know about what is to come. Even if I pass, then the boys’ll have some semblance of warning or foresight of just what is to come.

But what I really am trying to change - to truly make the most difference - is the upcoming Chunin Exams. That’s where everything changes. That’s when the Fourth Shinobi War really starts, and hell if I’m sitting backseat for that.
My fist connects with Lee’s solar plexus, and we disengage from each other - circling at a distance, wary.

I can’t do anything preemptively about the Sandaime’s death - and I honestly shouldn’t. As much as I appreciate how much he loves Ruto he’s a liability. Danzo has been active too long under his rule, he should’ve retired years ago and brought his damn old teammates down with him.

No, I decide as I take a debilitating blow to the knee, I need to focus on what I can control. I don’t need to do much - I just need to do it well.

Sasuke. That’s what I can control. That’s what I’ll change.

From there I’ll just be forced to play it by ear.

Or something.

“Noa-hasu!”

At the sound of Lee’s endless enthusiasm, I smile and push myself off the ground. After years of near constant exposure to shear Youth I’ve grown numb to the rainbows and crashing waves, but I can still appreciate how overwhelming it must be to others.

“Yes, Lee?” I ask rhetorically, “I hope this isn’t another challenge, Neji’ll get lonely.”

Neji wasn’t quite as bad this time around, somehow along the way he became more appreciative of his teammates, and although he was still a stick-up-his-ass, pain-in-the-ass, at least he valued Team Gai for what it was.

“YOSH! I would never abandon my Eternal Rival in this way! I was simply wondering if you would do me the honor to join me for 100 laps around Konoha before the sun sets!”

I peer up at the pastnoon sun, and can’t help but feel the rush of anticipation of the challenge.

“Sure Lee.” I grin, dusting myself off, “Sure.”

“ You haven’t come by. ”

Oh god, I didn’t want to have to talk to him. He was going to try and fix me and -

“Sorry, Stag. But I was training. The Chunin Exams are coming up, I hear. I want to pass on my first try.”

The unspoken ‘Because this might be my only try’ echoes between us with long standing familiarity. I can’t look at him, I’m afraid to. Sasuke and Ruto had looked at me with sadness, seeing all those they lost and never had disappearing in an instant. I ran into Anko and she looked at me with anger, losing someone who never cared about her being Orochimaru’s reject to something she couldn’t stick full of senbon and kunai. Ibiki was neutral, so painfully neutral that I was afraid that if he showed any emotion then a dam would break and all of T&I would come crashing down.
I couldn’t stand Stag looking at me like that. Not ever. And certainly not now.

He walked up beside me and I shut my eyes, deprived of not one but two senses now that my chakra sensing was gone for good.

Unless I wanted to die.

“*You never did teach me how to play chess.*”

His voice was casual, normal. His use of English is so casual and he’s so stupidly genius that he doesn’t even have a fucking accent. With my eyes closed, with the familiar thrum of American consonants and vowels on a familiar topic, and it feels a little bit like coming home. *Really* coming home.

And in that instant I want to cry, because if I could have one person in this whole damn universe be my rock, my anchor.

It would be Nara fucking Shikamaru.

---

**HATAKE KAKASHI**

Noa-chan wasn’t getting along well with her teammates.

If someone had told him that a month ago he would’ ve shipped them off to have a dinner date with Ibiki, yet here they were.

She was dying. And dying alone.

It wasn’t obvious that something was up - just subtle. Little things. How her boys suddenly seemed far too nervous about everything she did, seemed to want to tie her down and guard her day and night. But she was having none of it; she threw herself into training with an amount of vigor that even Gai had to tell her to take a break.

Noa-chan was dying but she didn’t want to go out without a very much literal fight.

But her boys couldn’t see that and it was killing her just as much as her chakra coils were.

He hoped this was a good decision, entering them into the Chunin Exams.

---

**SABAKU NO GAARA**

Mother was angry - calling for the blood of the stupid little girl who dared run into him -

“*OH my gosh! Sorry!*”

Mother fell silent … eerily so.

She ... wasn’t afraid of us?

She was *apologizing*?
And she meant it?

“Oh! You must be here for the chunin exams! You’re from Suna, right?”

Why wasn’t she afraid? She wasn’t special, she was completely normal. Possibly a little foreign looking but we were not in Wind Country.

But she just didn’t care - about him, about herself.

“Name’s Noa!” A slight hesitation, “Tsubasa Noa.”

Why is she still here?

Why is she waiting for me to speak?

What do I say?

Where are Temari and Kankuro?

Why isn’t Mother talking?

Is Mother - curious?

“What’s your name?”

My name?

Gaara. Sabaku no Gaara.

“Well, brat? Tell her that.”

Mother wanted me to ... talk to her?

“Well it’s nice to meet you, Gaara.” The Tsubasa girl said, and I decide that I like her voice, “I hope to also compete in the Chunin Exams this year. Good luck, and I hope we meet on the field!”

No one has ever said it was nice to meet me.

No one has ever wished me luck.

No one has ever said they wanted to fight with me - in a friendly way.

I can hear Mother laughing -
So that’s what Mother meant when they said that Tsubasa are hilarious to watch.

Maybe that’s why my chest feels like this.

---

TSUBASA NOA

“We’re finishing up early today, my cute little genin!”

I relax from my kata, muscles protesting loudly at their increased workload. Ruto and Sasuke let out simultaneous huffs of air and seem to crumble onto the packed ground of the training grounds, tension from their spar leaking into the ground.

“I’ve nominated you for the Chunin Exams.”

I’m frozen for less than a second before I disregard my aching muscles and tackle-hug Kakashi Ruto style. “Thank you thank you thank you THANK YOU! Oh my gosh we totally have to pass on our first time this is going to be great ooooooooh who else has entered? Did Stag? Did you talk to Asuma-sensei? Does he know? What about Team Gai? Did anyone else…”

“WHOA!” Kakashi yells, cutting me off. “Calm down there Chibi-chan! I only understood about half of that!”

Blushing, I shut up, still hang off Kakashi like a limpet. By now the boys have joined us, and they both seem strangely tense, but it might’ve just been because they’re tired. I climb up Kakashi’s shoulders until I’m sat on them like a little kid, one hand fisted in his gravity defying silver hair, and grin at them.

“Oh c’mon boys! You two should both be as excited about this as I am! We’re rookies and we’re being entered into the Chunin Exams!”

Despite my efforts, both of the boys seemed to become even more worried and I feel Kakashi tense under me; his grip on my ankles tightening ever so slightly. I frown and am about to comment on it when -

“Nee-chan, you shouldn’t enter into the exams.”

Sharp betrayal cuts through me like a red hot kunai, “I’m sorry, what?”

“You shouldn’t - it’s dangerous and now that you can’t use chakr-”

I don’t know how I suddenly got in front of him, but suddenly I’m there and furious -


He freezes, caught aback - either by my use of his given name or by my tone - but I waste no time, seizing his wrist in my steel grip and wrenching him towards me.

“I am not dead.” I repeat, pressing his limp palm onto my chest - right over my heart. “I have a heart that is still beating. I have blood pumping through my veins. I have breath in my lungs. I am not dead.”

I shove him back and bare down on him, my voice rising unconsciously as I let out the anger and frustration that had been building for days - weeks -
“I am a Shinobi. I serve my village. And yes, I am going to die - but not here. Not now. Not as a fucking Genin. I have three years! Do you know how much you can do in three years?”

Quick as lightning, I round on a very startled looking Kakashi-sensei, and point at him dangerously. “Kakashi. How old were you when you made Chunin?”

Taken aback, he takes a second to answer. “Six. I was six.”

I ignore the shock emanating off the boys behind me, and continue on full force. “And how old were you when you made Jonin?”

“Twelve.”

I whirl back around to the boys. “There, you see? Kakashi made Chunin at the age of six and six years later he was Jonin. He had the handicaps of being so young that he had a limited amount he could train before he damaged his growth and that he had to retrain himself as he grew. And! No one would take him seriously because he was so young!

“I’m 13! That means that I have already gotten a huge chunk of my growing done, even more so because my Auntie was short! And this isn’t war time and people actually take me seriously despite my age! I’ve proven that! It doesn’t matter that I can’t do my tricks or my medic-ninjutsu - with my aim and my taijutsu there’s no reason that I shouldn’t be able to reach Jonin in half the time just because I’m some bastard child!”

At that Sasuke tries to protest, and I cut him off before he can even fully form a syllable. “No, Sasuke! I am an orphaned, foreign, bastard child of a clan that doesn’t even exist anymore! I have a mutated Kekkei Genkai that is slowly killing me and I can’t use my chakra system without driving myself into the ground - but that doesn’t matter!

“I will reach Jonin. I have three years - and I will make it. I am not dying as some orphaned nobody that was the one member of Team 7 that never grew up so suck it up! I will be recognized by this village! I will serve my village and the people of this Nation with pride and I will drag your sorry asses along with me for the ride!

“Am I clear, you morons?”

Silence: tense silence that wriggles into my stomach like a seed of doubt that kills me.

“Yes, Noa.” Sasuke says, low but firm. “And like hell will you be the one doing the dragging, we walk side by side in this team.”

I look to Ruto, shoulders tense and see a wry smile on his face.

“Well be better get ready for those exams, then.”
"And most importantly - YOU PISSED ME OFF-"

TSUBASA NOA

“ It’s an illusion. ”

I rip my eyes away from where I was watching a very much faking Rock Lee attempt to get into a very much illusioned room to face Sasuke, who was - indeed - correct in his assessment. I smile at his casual use of English and thank kami that he wasn’t a pompous fool this time around - we didn’t need any more competition to know about the genjutsu, thankyouverymuch!

Ruto catches on quick, and we flank him to the staircases, intent on heading to the real third floor. We’re just on the steps when -

“NOA-HASU!”

“ Shit so much for getting away quietly. ” I muttered, turning to face a very much enthusiastic and unharmed Lee. I hear Sasuke ‘hn’ in amusement, and Ruto mutter something about ‘ bushy brows. ’

“Noa-hasu! I did not know you were participating in the exams!” Lee rockets off, suddenly right in front of me and vibrating with excitement. “Perhaps the two of us will achieve chunin in the most Youthful way! Without chakra!”

By then half the room was staring and Neji and Tenten had come upon us at a much more sedate pace, obviously frustrated with Lee’s enormous enthusiasm.

“What?!” Tenten hissed, tension in her stance. “What does he mean without chakra? You’re a chakra based fighter, Noa-chan!”

I feel the tension radiating off my boys and the stares growing heavier and I can feel the headache building behind my eyes. Neji activates his Byakugan and is about to say something but I cut him off sharply.

“I have a damaged chakra system, Tenten-chan. It’s nothing bad. -” I shoot Neji a warning look, “- but it just means until I get treated I’ll be relying more on taijutsu and my aim than my tricks, is all.”
Neji speaks up then, and I glare at the sound of his voice. “And you still think you can compete in the Exams?”

I kick my glare up a couple notches and gesture meaningfully at Lee, “Do you think he can?”

Fed up with the doubts of my health, I whirl around, grab my boys’ wrists, and drag them all up the real third floor myself.

“Shit, that is a lot of people.”

I mentally count just how many people are in this crowded exam room and revise my assessment.

“Shit, that is a fuckton of people.”

The boys seem unworried as they begin to take stock of their competition. I know our ages may throw many off, but at least this time around our immaturity and appearances aren’t quite so ... orange.

I was dressed in a way that wasn’t meant to look good, though I ended up looking pretty kickass despite my lack of fucks given about fashion, if I do say so myself. I wore a steel mesh top down to my wrists under a forest green, lightly armored kimono-style vest. The obi that I wore had a secondary belt that swung low over my right hip and strapped to my right thigh, full of weapons and storage scrolls full of every possible tool and supply imaginable. I wore pants in the jounin style, navy blue with taped ankles and had two kunai and shuriken pouches (one for each leg). On my feet were a pair of reinforced combat boots designed to grip and kick better than any shinobi sandal ever could.

Sasuke was dressed even simpler, with a wide necked Uchiha-styled shirt over a mesh top. His pants too were jounin style as well, though he had shinobi sandals on rather than my kick ass combat boots. He had another two holsters, one on his hip and another on his thigh, plus a multitude of hidden weapons across his person. From where she was walking behind him, she could clearly see the Uchiha crest emblazoned proudly across his back.

However it was Ruto who had changed the most in appearance. After one particularly rough go about trying to find Tora the Demon Cat, Kakashi finally snapped and hunted down and burnt every single orange jumpsuit his sensei’s son owned. He immediately replaced them, and the rest of his wardrobe, with some higher quality gear that was severely less eye searing. Ruto was now dressed more like how he looked after the timeskip. He wore thick, reinforced ninja sandals over his taped ankles, the bandages colored in a dull, burnt orange. His pants weren’t the timeskip’s painful orange, but rather in the standard jounin style in black. He wore a mesh top with long sleeves under his classic black and orange jacket, though the orange was much darker, and the back had the Uzumaki crest in his old bright orange. His holsters were held in place by the same orange bandages that taped his ankles, and his gear was of far better quality this time around.

They looked like shinobi, not children.

And wasn’t that a relief!

“Sasuke-kun!”
I have to physically restrain myself to stop Ino from being impaled. **God!** When your Gai-honed instincts are to whip out self-made kunai, then you want to **whip out self-made kunai**.

This was going to be a problem.

“I haven’t seen you for so long!” Ino exclaims with no small amount of enthusiasm. She spots me, and reorients herself from where she was hanging over Sasuke’s shoulders to get a better look at me. “Noa-chan! I haven’t seen you for months! You grew your hair out!”

I smile demurely at the Yamanaka and tuck some flyaways behind my ear. My crazy curly hair - carried from my last life into this one - was long enough that down it hung past my waist. I wore it half-up-half-down, with little sections braided and hanging loose to keep it out of my face. I would pin it up when we entered the forest and for combat, but I wasn’t concerned for now.

“Thanks, Ino. Where’s the rest of your team?”

She pouts at a megawatt level, and gestures unenthusiastically behind her, “Oh, they’re back there. They’re so lazy!”

I smile, “Well one of them is a Nara, you know.”

Ignoring Ino’s grumbling, I look over and see the rest of Team 10 approaching. Checking that my team was fine - debating something about the appropriate use of storage seals for instant ramen - I walk over to them. I wave casually to Choji, smiling at the Akimichi, before frowning at the bags under Shika’s eyes.

“**Stag.** What’s up with those circles? You look like the walking dead.”

He just sighs something that sounds suspiciously like a ‘troublesome,’ so I turned to his partner in crime. “Choji? What’s up with Shika?”

He continues to munch away at his chips, but in a manner that displays more his worry than Akimichi necessity. “I dunno. He’s been training a lot recently, and has been really tired.”

I nod in thanks, and round and get right into Shikamaru’s face, not even bothering to hide my irritation or worry, “**Stag. I know that you know your limits - you need to take care of yourself! You could get yourself hurt without proper rest, and this is an exam! If you aren’t well rested - you won’t do well!**”

That time around I definitely heard a ‘troublesome.’ **That little shi**-

“ - Well I can’t blame you - you’re clueless rookies. Reminds me how I used to be my first time round.”

I freeze, dread that I can’t quite keep from my face sinking into my stomach. I turn around and forcefully meander back to my team as casually as I can - back to where one of the biggest players in the Fourth Shinobi War was talking to my brother and Ino, telling them off for being ‘too childish’ -

“ - Nope, my seventh time. This exam is held twice a year - this is my fourth year.”

I’m upon them. I sidle up to Sasuke, and I can see Kabuto calculating my worth and skills, and even if it would kill me I want to make my familiar sai and **run him through** -

Rage pounds in my ears, and before I know it I’ve lost half the conversation and suddenly he has
his damn Info Cards out and -

When did Team 9 get here?

Rage. Control it, Noa. Don’t make a scene. Don’t make a scene-

“Oh! You gonna show us anything we want on the people here?”

Holy shit. Kiba shut the fuck up -

Kiba and I rarely overlapped in the Academy by no fault of mine. As the top kunoichi, but also a civilian, he thought me a curious thing, one that was pretty much harmless. Like a puppy. He looked down on me, and I didn’t want to deal with him. We managed to dodge each other for most of our schooling.

That was until the year of our graduation, he and I ended up pitched against each other in the semi-finals of our taijutsu tournament. Kiba’s pride was wounded when someone he disregarded as an ‘omega’ suddenly beat him - all thanks to Gai’s teachings, of course. But the Inuzuka didn’t know that.

He and I have butted heads ever since.

“Who do you want to know about?”

Wait - Kiba don’t you fucking DARE-

“Noa. Leaf genin. Whadayagot?”

That little shit-

The nearby chunin candidates all lean in closer, wanting to see what kind of quality information this older Leaf genin would have on a no-name shinobi. Kabuto only smirked, complying and whipping out a card.

That he had.

On me -

“Name - Tsubasa Noa,” Kabuto starts, putting extra emphasis on my clan name - glancing up at me. A few foreign genin shift in recognition, glancing up at me. Kumo especially didn’t seem happy at the name. I remain stoic, arms crossed, however and send as much KI I could physically produce right at Kabuto as if daring him to continue.

Which he did.

“13 years old. Newly graduated, one of the Rookies of the Leaf this year.


“Her jounin-sensei is Hatake Kakashi, but originally was tutored under Konoha’s Green Beast Maito Gai - where her taijutsu became exemplary. Her teammates are Uchiha Sasuke-” Here the spy glances up at Sasuke, “- and Uzumaki Naruto.

“Notably -”
He cuts himself off here dramatically, and by now it seems like the entire room is staring at me - the Tsubasa with the hundreds of D-Ranks and the two famous sensei. I hate it.

When he starts again, there is no shortage of admiration in his voice, “Notably she is known to have the Tsubasa Kekkei Genkai, which allows her to create an almost endless possibility of objects using her chakra alone, recycling it as she goes. This bloodline limit she used to defeat the Bloody Mist’s missing-nin Momochi Zabuza in close combat.”

The silence is deafening.

“That all you got?”

The room is silent as they all look at a 13 year old girl who defeated one of the Seven Swordsmen. I hate it. Kabuto looks taken aback, and vaguely apologetic. He begins to speak, but I raise one hand very threateningly and shut him up.

So much for not making a scene.

“That all you got?” I repeat, my voice as deadly as the prodigy the candidates in this room believe me to be. “Because I’ve got something for you-”

And in the next instant he’s on the ground, my fist in his stomach and my hand on his throat. I’m hissing in his face, but my voice carries through the very quiet room, “You are a Konoha genin. That means something - even if you’re a disgrace to the title.

“You just revealed what you believe to be completely correct information about one of your allies - comrades - in a room FULL of foreign shinobi. You used information that is out of date and incorrect to inform your allies of a possible threat and you did so without shame or alerting them of the possibility of error.

“You acted in a way that only an ignorant Academy student or a spy would - but either way you have no right to be here.

“And, most importantly - you pissed me off -!”

“NOA!”
“Tell Tsubasa Noa to see me before the Second Exam.”

NARA SHIKAMARU

In a puff of chakra dust, one of the tallest people that I have ever seen appeared, yelling Noa’s name. He was even more scarred than Tou-san, and was backed up by at least twenty intimidating chunin.

Noa didn’t seem to care though, and in the eerily silent room the only sound was Kabuto’s rough breathing.

Kabuto. That was another mystery. Noa never really hated someone, always tolerant but wary, and definitely never without reason. When she had first heard Kabuto’s voice, her immediate response was one of wariness and dread.

Dread changed to unparalleled fury as Kabuto began to reveal information about her - I would’ve stepped in if I hadn’t known that she could’ve handled herself.

As she proved that she could.

I can’t remember her ever that furious -

Noa still has Kabuto pinned, so the proctor takes a single step forward, intimidating most of the room into taking a single step back. “Noa. You were provoked, but I will show no favoritism. There will be no fighting without the permission of an examiner. Even if fighting is permitted killing your opponent is not tolerated. These rules apply to all, and those that disobey will be failed immediately.”

Noa still hasn’t moved, so Naruto and Sasuke move to pull her off Kabuto. Once he’s free, Kabuto immediately scrambles up and away. Noa still looks murderous, and the proctor doesn’t seem mollified.

“Am. I. Clear?” He repeats, KI leaking off directly at Noa.

“Clear, Morino-san.” Noa bites out, anger still radiating off her frame. “I apologize for any disruptions I caused, sir.”
The objective of the exam is to cheat.

As troublesome as it is, I play along. I have to. I can’t be lazy here.

Noa is on the line.

I sigh and scratch out the answers to the nine questions provided right away on the test. I put my pencil down with a decisive click and sit back as I prepare for Ino to enter my mind and copy my answers.

As I feel my childhood friend take over my body, I take the chance to mentally sit back and think.

At this point in time I have one goal: to ensure that Noa lives.

If only it was that easy, just saying that I would. There were two main threats to Noa: her Kekkei Genkai and her career.

Noa’s bloodline limit is killing her; she is genetically unable to make a Yin Seal. Artificial Yin Seals are practically unheard of, and even the Nara library has little to no information on them despite the Nara techniques being Yin based.

There was little that he could do; he simply didn’t have the resources to access any data on that. So he had to get those resources. And access came with rank.

Noa was becoming a chunin.

So I had to be there right along with her.

No matter how troublesome it was.

________________________________________

**UZUMAKI NARUTO**

“And now … We will begin the 10th question.”

Shit - I my disqualified henge-d clone team only managed to get four of the nine possible answers. At least Sasuke must’ve been able to use his Sharingan to get at least that many, and Nee-chan was smart enough to answer all of them on her own and double check her answers against everyone else’s.

God I love my team.

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God I love my team.

“Now - before we get to it - I would like to go over the added rules for this question.”

I sit back and glance at my teammates - added rules?

“First, for the 10th question … you must decide whether you will take it or not.”

“Choose?” A Suna kunoichi - the one that was with the cat-man who threatened Konohamaru a couple days ago - cries out. “What happens if we choose not to?”

Morino-san didn’t look amused, “If you choose not to, your points will be reduced to zero, and you’ll fail! Along with your two teammates.”
Outrage sounded through the room, but Morino-san (who I still haven’t figured out how N Nee-chan knew) cuts through it easily. “And now the other rule. If you choose to take it and answer incorrectly - that team will lose the right to take the Chunin Selection Exam again.”

Damn there had better be a loophole here.

Noa and Sasuke - I have to have confidence in them, just like they have confidence in me.

According to Kabuto’s cards, 153 genin walked into the exam. After 13 minutes, that number had been cut to less than half. So far, all of Konoha’s Rookie 9 plus Team Gai was still here but Hinata looked on the edge. Carefully, as to not tip off the examiners, I reached over and gave her hand a squeeze, looking at her reassuringly.

She turned a rather alarming shade of red, but I ignore that in favor of giving her a winning smile - my message coming across clear as day.

‘Don’t worry, Hinata. You’ll do great.’

MORINO IBIKI

54 genin. 18 Teams. Impressive.

Especially considering that that number would’ve been 51 had the Uzumaki brat not calmed down the Hyuuga heiress. Points to him for that.

“I congratulate you on passing the first test!”

I drop the overly intimidating act and begin to explain the mechanisms of the test, gauging the reactions of the genin. The Kazekage’s daughter seemed quite indignant, and Konoha Teams 10 and 7 seemed unsurprised, understandable considering the Nara heir and Noa. The Oto nin were simply apathetic.

As I remove my hitai-ate, I continue to examine their reactions. Some are unimpressed - the arrogant ones - but most are filled with disgust or fear.

Except Noa. She wasn’t even looking.

She was glaring at Yakushi Kabuto.

As Anko comes in, dramatic as ever, I signal to one of the chunin proctors, a kunoichi I haven’t worked with before. “Tell Tsubasa Noa to see me before the Second Exam.”

“Noa.”

“Morino-san.”

I look her over. Her increased training with Gai is clear, her hands worn and muscles built. Her
stance is lose as if expecting a fight and her posture angry. She was wary that something would happen and that something had to do with some unremarkable Konoha genin.

And she was calling me Morino-san. Noa never used someone’s formal title unless she was angry or trying to alert someone of danger - I had heard that much from Kakashi and Gai.

“Do you have something to ask or say, Morino-san? Because I have the second part of an Exam to risk my life in.”

I’ll play along then.

“Tsubasa-san. You were in an altercation with another Exam Participant. Do you wish to explain your actions?”

Of course, I had been listening in on the genin entering the exam room - and I’m sure Noa knew that - but I saw no reason to verbalize it. She was smart enough to know what I was getting at. In response Noa only leveled an overly malicious glare at the door where I knew Kabuto to have exited.

“It was nothing, Morino-san. Kabuto cited information of which he had no right or reason to know, and I told him that he was either a fool or a spy for knowing so much about his own allies and giving the information out so recklessly.”

---

“Boar,” I call out watching from the window as Noa meets up with the rest of her team outside Training Ground 44 - the Forest of Death. When the silent guard appears, I don’t even bother looking over at them, “Put a watch on Leaf Genin Yakushi Kabuto. Report any suspicious characters, interactions, or actions directly to either me or the Hokage.”

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TSUBASA NOA

“ I have a bad feeling about this. ” I mutter to Sasuke, “Ruto can feel someone coming - that Kusa nin who picked up the knife that Anko threw at Kiba. The one with the tongue.”

Orochimaru. The Snake Bastard.

But I can’t just say that.

He looked appraisingly at me, and then over to Ruto who’s setting an insanely large number of traps. “ A threat to us? At our level?”

That wasn’t Uchiha Sasuke arrogance. That was the fact that we were well into Chunin level already, and there was no reason to deny it.

I shake my head a frown, scanning our surroundings. “Ruto says that they have levels like a jounin - at least.”

He simply frowns and begins to help Ruto set his traps as I stand guard.
A wave of KI so strong I’m forced to my knees washes over us, and before a full second passes the three of us have simultaneously plunged kunai into arms and legs to rid ourselves of its influence.

We’re in a back to back triangle formation when the Kusa nin - (who is actually Orochimaru) - begins to chuckle evilly from a branch far above us. “Ohohohoho … Prey knows how to fight back.”

The wave of KI redubes, and my knees buckle under the force of it. I tighten my grip on my kunai and grit my teeth, “You’re not a genin.”

A cruel smile exposing disgusting teeth, “No, Tsubasa-chan. I am not.”

And he’s done monologuing.


I’m in front of Ruto, taking the hit of the five point seal - my chakra is useless anyway.

Sasuke - second tomoe. Worry mixed with fear and anger.


My head spinning, Ruto yelling - and fear. So much fear.

And suddenly Orochimaru is right in front of me and-

Everything stops.
I’m frozen in pure, unadulterated terror as the traitor of the Legendary Sannin strokes my cheek, almost lovingly.

His hand is rough and calloused and disgusting -

“The last of the Tsabasa Clan,” He mutters, almost to himself. His eyes are picking me apart, examining me like a fascinating bug he found beneath his shoe, “Aren’t you something. A five point seal straight to the stomach and you’re still standing.”

He grips my chin, forcing my face upwards - “I was going to give my gift to your little Uchiha-kun …”

Wait no SHIT -

“But I think you will like it just as much -”

His mouth is on my neck and -

Self preservation kicks in.

There are 361 tenketsu in the human body. Of that 361, five span from shoulder blade to shoulder blade.

When I feel the bite of Orochimaru’s teeth and foreign chakra burrowing into my system, I let my instincts run wild heedless of consequence.

All of my chakra in an instant is forming a barrier around the tenketsu in my neck, and begins pushing - forcing the foreign chakra out the same way I would that chakra for one of my tricks -

And it burns -
I scream - one long, high note full of all the pain that the curse mark is inflicting and the pain that I won’t have time to save them because my chakra will kill me and -

“NOA! What did you do to her?”

Shit no Sasuke don’t -

Orochimaru chuckles and releases me, allowing me to fall to the ground in a heap - chakra systems burning. I feel boneless, surreal - as if I wasn’t really even there.

But before I lose consciousness I hear his last words, “I have only left a gift for little Tsubasa-chan, Uchiha-kun. And I’ll being coming back for her - and you.”

UCHIHA SASUKE

When that creep is gone, I’m practically alone.

Naruto came back, charging at the sound of Noa’s scream, but the snake that Orochimaru sent after the both of us had bit him, and based off the severe discoloration of his veins, he was poisoned.

So now, I’m all alone in the Forest of Death; caring for two injured teammates.

This is bad.

I know that Orochimaru is still out there somewhere. He said that he had a team of his own, one no doubt approved by the Legendary Sannin himself, somewhere in the Forest.

This is bad.

As day breaks, they approach.

One nin, covered in bandages, is the first to speak, “Uchiha Sasuke. Come with us, and we’ll let your teammates live. Don’t ...”

The kunoichi in their group smirks, “- And they’ll never wake up again.”

YAMANAKA INO

Shikamaru is more restless than usual, and I don’t think it’s just the test.

We’ve gotten our scrolls, managed to wipe out an Ame team without much trouble, but he still looks like he’s waiting for the second shoe to drop.

My worries for him only increase when we come across Team 7, Sasuke fighting aside a Leaf genin I didn’t know against three other opponents, the rest of his team unconscious.

The Oto nin were winning. Against Sasuke -

Shikamaru doesn’t even hesitate, immediately trapping the bandaged Oto in his shadows, mimicking plunging a kunai into his throat.
The Oto nin is dead before he hits the ground.

I’m shocked - paralyzed - for just a moment before Choji is dragging me out of the bushes to avoid a blast from the remaining male shinobi, if only by a hair. Shikamaru, the lazy bum who can never get motivated, dead sprints to where Noa and Naruto are knocked out on the ground, checking them both over quickly but efficiently.

I focus back on the fight, and find it almost over. The Oto nin claim that they’re outmatched, leaving their scroll as a token of their retreat.

For this entire fight - no matter how short it was - I have been *useless* and -

I can’t think about this right now. My friends are hurt - Noa is hurt -

They left an Earth scroll. I walk over, wary of traps, and pick it up, looking.

Shikamaru being forced to kill his first enemy nin wasn’t worth a damn scroll.

---

Lee - the other Genin introduced himself - and Sasuke look about ready to collapse, and Shikamaru’s face keeps getting grimmer and grimmer the longer he examines the rest of Team 7. He looks up suddenly, eyes on the scroll in my hand before making eye contact we me - and I give a start of shock at how serious he looks.

Noa…

“We have the scrolls we need, but Sasuke,” He calls out to the last Uchiha, who is watching the other Leaf genin retreating back as he returns to his team. “Which scroll do you have?”

He glances over, “Heaven. We have the Heaven scroll.”

Shika looks faintly pleased at this, and smiles grimly, “Well then. We better get going.”

---

**SARUTOBI ASUMA**

“You pas- ! Holy shit!”

As I’m summoned side by side with the Academy teacher Iruka-sensei I’m immediately assaulted with the look of six completely exhausted genin. Ino is supporting the Last Uchiha - and isn’t even fangirling about it - while Choji has the Uzumaki kid on his back, only half conscious and clearly in pain.

And Shikamaru is taking point with Tsubasa Noa unconscious in his arms.

“Medic, *now* ,” Shikamaru barks out with the command of an ANBU taicho. “Sasuke is exhausted. Naruto is poisoned. And Noa used her chakra.”
We waste no time getting the medic-nin, and just as treatment begins to be administered Kakashi comes in like a whirlwind, all speed and power.

“What. Happened?”

I explain to him the best I can what I got from my students. I would’ve questioned Team 7 directly, but Sasuke passed out of pure exhaustion soon after they arrived, Noa’s in no condition to do anything, and Naruto is delirious from the poison. Must’ve been a hell of a snake to knock a Jinchuriki out of commission.

But because I’m not a suicidal idiot, I don’t tell angry Alpha-Kakashi that.

Kakashi for just a millisecond looks so lost -

And then he’s by Sasuke’s newly treated side, shaking him awake. “Sasuke. Sasuke! I need you to tell me what happened.”

The genin groans, heel of his hand rubbing into his eye. “Orochimaru.”

My blood turns to ice, and I turn to a very stiff Kakashi, “Did he just say Orochimaru?”

Sasuke sits up, more fully awake and suddenly urgent. “Yes! He attacked our team disguised as a Kusa kunoichi. We fought and he sent off a snake to chase Naruto and poison him after he failed to put some kind of seal on him. Noa took the seal for him and -”

He swallows thickly, as if not wanting to believe what he was about to say. “- and Orochimaru bit her.”

Kakashi has whirled around to face me in an instant, and before he can say anything I’m off -

I need to find Anko and my dad immediately.

---

HATAKE KAKASHI

Sasuke went back to sleep soon after reaccounting the full fight to Anko, myself, and Hokage-sama. Naruto woke up an hour ago, a very fatal chakra targeting poison effects weakened by the Kyuubi’s healing factor. But Noa is still unconscious.

She was forced to use her chakra to eject most of Orochimaru’s cursed seal. I managed to seal the remains of the mark, but Noa would only be able to get rid of it completely by fighting it aggressively with her own chakra. Which was not an option.

I’m sitting next to her as she begins to stir, and I give her hand a gentle squeeze. It takes her a moment, but she’s alert and on guard once she fully realizes that she’s awake. “Orochimaru -!”

“Is not here.” I assure, soothing her. “Do you remember what happened?”

She nods cautiously, and begins to recount an explanation that follows Sasuke’s account of events.
I feel my stomach sink and my fuse shorten as she goes on.

“… and then he -” She swallows thickly. “He was touching me - and I just wanted to scream but I was terrified and then his mouth was on my neck and -”

I give her hand another squeeze, and she gathers herself - and looked me straight in the eye. “I used my chakra.”

Her question is clear.

“18 months. You have 18 months.”

She gives me a small smile, “Well then I really have to make Chunin now.”
THE THIRD STAGE - PART ONE

Chapter Summary

Too much to hope that I would get the bye? Probably.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! I realize that I’ve been a little unfair to the lot of you - and I don't mean to! Writer's block is chronic, and only after I finished this chapter did the chapters become better lengths!

But worry not! I have quite a few chapters up in the queue - so you won't have any shortage, at least until the end of the Chunin Exams.

To make up for being a bit of a horrible person this morning - what with the 1,400 word chapter and all - here you go! One day and two chapters!

Lots of Love, thank you for reading!

Milo Of The Key

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - Thoughts

In Text Bolded - Tailed Beast

TSUBASA NOA

I tighten a pair of fingerless gloves, scanning the Chunin candidates left in the exam. It had been five days since the beginning of the Exams; three days since Team 10 dragged Team 7’s sorry asses back to the Tower.

There are 18 shinobi left in the exam. Shikamaru killed Dosu - from the Oto team, the one with the bandages - so the entirety of the team got disqualified. That meant that the fights that I remembered from the first time this happened no longer are valid, and that meant that anything could happen.

I do a headcount, taking stock of injuries and unknowns.

Obviously, Team 7 was here. Ruto completely recovered from his bout of snake venom our first day back, and Sasuke managed to sleep off his chakra exhaustion. I have to stop myself from
reaching up to touch where the flutter of foreign chakra - *Orochimaru’s* chakra - rests in my deltoid.

It makes me feel sick. Violated. Raped, for hell’s sake.

At least I didn’t need to use my chakra for the fights, right? Barely a consolation.

Team 10 was almost unharmed, though mentally shaken. I don’t know what’s up with Shika, but he’s all kinds of tense - and angry. He’s angry about something.

At least Choji and Ino got him to sleep.

Team 8 looks similarly unharmed, but Kiba and Akamaru keep sending fearful glances Gaara’s way, which reminds me of just how bloodthirsty Ruto’s fellow Jinchuriki is this point in time. That was going to be a problem.

Temari, Kankuro, and Gaara are of course unharmed and unflustered. With a bijuu on their side, rogue or not, I would expect nothing less.

Team Gai is here, and Neji and Lee keep sending me appraising and worried looks respectively. Tenten looks like she got a pretty nasty cut along her left arm but nothing too bad.

Finally was Orochimaru’s plants, Kabuto’s team. The one with two other utterly unremarkable genin. I don’t remember their skills, only that they were genetically modified somehow by Orochimaru.

If Kabuto quit like he did last time that means that there would be 8 fights with one bye.

Too much to hope that I would get the bye? Probably.

---

I glare at Kabuto’s retreating back, but direct my attention back to the proceedings as Sasuke squeezes my arm with a tug.

“... There are basically no rules,” Gekko Hayate, the Third Exam’s proctor continues in his weak voice. “The fight continues until one of you dies, is knocked out, or admits defeat.”

I tune him out as the electronic scoreboard emerges from the wall, concentrating on the fight at hand. It had better not be -

Uchiha Sasuke V.S. Akado Yoroi

Huh. Didn’t that happen last time? Or was it the other Kabuto-teammate?

---

“That was kinda laughable.”

I glance over at Ruto, whose eyes are still fixed on Sasuke’s laguid frame. I nod in agreement as I turn back to the tail end of the fight, Akado’s ability to close range absorb chakra rendered useless by Sasuke’s initiative and aim.
Kunai + (Fire + Ninja wire + Shuriken) + Sasuke’s Aim = You dead.

After all, if you get charbroiled or stabbed by a well-aimed kunai before you can even touch your opponent what’s the point of having a touch based attack?

Hayate calls the match, and Ruto and I both turn to face the scoreboard on the wall behind us.

Akimichi Choji V.S. Gaara

“I FORFEIT!”

I glance over at the sound of Choji’s voice. “Well that was fast.”

Ruto just shrugs.

Kankuro’s match against Tsurugi Misumi went much the same this time around, though seeing every one of a person’s bones broken in one go is way more disgusting in real life.

Huh. I think being a shinobi has desensitized me from a lot of the stuff I would puke at in my last life. Whodathought?

Temari V.S. Tenten was much the same as Kankuro’s match in terms of how evenly matched they were, although Temari only treated the unconscious kunoichi a little roughly, not paralyzing her for life. Yay for mercy.

Yamanaka Ino V.S. Uzumaki Naruto

Now that is going to be an interesting match!

Ino up against Ruto is a big game of cat and mouse, Ruto immediately spammed the arena with an insane amount of clones, forcing Ino to deal with more opponents than she was really used to.

The game continues on for nearly twenty minutes, only one Ruto remained in the arena. Ino decides to risk attempting to possession after pinning him with her hair and some chakra, but the moment that Ino’s body collapsed to the ground a secondary Ruto - the real one - jumped straight out of the ground to give a decisive kick to the back of his clones head.

Ino sustained injury, and the match was called.

Inuzuka Kiba V.S. Nara Shikamaru

“Yeah! Go Stag! Kick his ass, EASY!”

Sasuke leans over around Ruto to shoot me an amused look. “Still bitter about the Kabuto card thing?”

I smile back a bit ferally, “Hell yeah.”
Choji sidles over to us as Shikamaru is announced the victor of his match. “Hey Noa, was it just me or was he much more motivated this match?”

I frown down at Shika where he’s dusting himself off after the match. “Yeah. I would say so. Usually this is all too troublesome for him but he put in the effort to make it effective and fast. He’s on his way to Chunin, easy.”

Choji just nods at my assessment and offers me a chip.

“Yum! BBQ! Thanks Choji!”

Neji is stopped by the jounin before he deals Hinata a killing blow. Kurenai stopped his legs and momentum while Hayate shielded Hinata bodily. Gai has him around the neck while Kakashi grabs Neji’s arm and -

I’m there a heartbeat after the jounin, slapping him across the face so hard his head snaps back. Kurenai moves to intercept me, stopping me before I could even consider smacking him again.

Neji glared at me, a flicker of betrayal in his eyes. “All of the jounin step in to stop me - more favoritism for the Main House, I see. Even you, Tsubasa-san-” He bites out my name, disgust dripping from his tone. “You mock the suffering of the Branch House.”

I wrench my arm free from Kurenai’s grip and stab a finger in his face, “You are an arrogant ass. What makes you think that pain gives anyone an excuse to act like that. Huh? Pain does not stop pain, Neji! It’s just and endless fucking cycle and you are perpetrating it! And victim-blaming? Ain’t going to change shit-!”

I’m almost glad Sasuke and Kakashi drag me out of the arena before I do something stupid like castrate and/or disembowel one of the few people my age I actually respect.

At least Ruto can beat some sense into him during the finals.

There are three of us left - Lee, me, and Shino.

Lee I can handle, but Shino -

I’ve never truly gotten to know him or his fighting style. He was quiet and I was always around Ruto; we didn’t overlap much. But I’d sparred against him in the Academy and speed was his weakness. His bugs though, if they start to eat away at me I’ll die even sooner than expected.

Fingers crossed for the bye, right?

Aburame Shino V.S. Tsubasa Noa.

Well fuck -
I’m only halfway to the railing before Kakashi has my shoulder in an iron grip and Shika and Sasuke are physically barring me from the arena.

“Forfeit.” Kakashi orders, in a no nonsense tone that brooked no room for argument.

Good thing I wasn’t planning on arguing.

“Proctor-san!” I call out, forcing my boys to relax but also for Kakashi to simply tighten his grip. “I am being blocked from entering the arena as is my right. Would I kindly be assisted, please?”

Hayate was trying, he really was, but he just kinda looked confused. “Yes, Tsubasa-san. Kakashi-san, if you do not allow her through you and Nara-san and Uchiha-san will be asked to leave and you will be unable to watch this portion of the Exam.”

Cue epic stare down.

“... Kakashi …”

And with a final parting growl, Kakashi pulls me into an unexpected hug before dragging the boys away, clearing the way for me to vault over the railing.

Shino is already there as I approach, and he raises a single eyebrow at my outburst and glances meaningfully at where Team 7 plus Shika are stewing in a mixture of anger and worry.

I wave it off as if the matter was unimportant, which it isn’t but if I don’t make it to the final rounds I’m *fucked* so -

“It’s nothing. Kakashi-sensei was just angry because I forgot to tell him that I borrowed his shampoo this morning and he’s *really* sensitive about that!”

Shino gives a slight snort, and I return his slight smile with a wide grin. “Heyo! He has emotions! Quick, call a medic!”

“I will enjoy this match,” Shino states, a sliver of emotion in his voice. “Why? Because you are a worthy opponent. Fight well, Noa-san.”

I smile yet again, glad that at least *someone* was happy with this match. “And you, Shino-san. And you.”
I will go on record - on whatever - to tell ANYONE with a damaged chakra system to not fight a Aburame.

That is called a ‘BAD IDEA’ and is likely to get you killed -

GOD!

I pop out a storage seal - sick of dodging to no effect - and whip out a pair of sai that I got custom made from Tenten’s family shop after my DNA decided to try and kill me. I jump back - far enough away to keep any and all of Shino’s bugs in my sight - and level a firm look at Shino.

“Shino-san. I have the ability to kill of swarms of your kikaichu at a time but I do not wish to. Please forfeit lest I cause your hive any unnecessary damage.”

Shino gives pause, considering. “No. I will not. Why? Because I do not believe you are that capable.”

I nod, a little saddened. “Well then. I hope your kikaichu survive this.”

And then I’m on the offense.

Bugs get through, of course they do. Not even the best defences, even Gaara’s, are foolproof, much less mine. I feel three - neck, knee, waist - but have no time to swat them as I dance like the wind; I slice and cut and bar and dodge as Shino’s swarm is cut down bit by bit. It pains me, I know how much the Aburame value their insects, but I have no choice.

I have to live, and I have to win.

Guess these exams were more like the real life than I thought.

“I FORFEIT.” Shino bellows, distraught by how extensive the damage I caused was. I immediately cease the path of my blades before they hit the remnants of his swarm, backing away and looking at my feet, avoiding stepping on any injured. I’ve been on the offensive for less than a full minute.
“Why? Because I underestimated you.”

I look up at him, and give him a small, sad smile. “I apologize Shino-san, but I will become Chunin. And for that to happen, I had to win.”

He gave a little nod, and I can feel the disappointment and grief he feels for his hive.

“If there is anything I can do to help aid you in rebuilding your hive feel free to ask. I have a heavy heart for being forced to injure any allies, kikaichu or not.”

He looks over at me again, though this time it was less with wariness and grief, but more calculation and gratefulness. And maybe a bit of respect.

I think I maybe made a friend today.

The moment I hit the top of the steps I’m trapped in Shikamaru’s shadow. I panic - just a bit - and struggle against it until I feel two very large hands on my shoulders.

“Fuck...”


“Yes, Chibi-chan,” Kakashi continues from my other side, sounding deceptively light. “You know better.”

I glare at the both of them, but turn to Stag at the sound of his voice.

“Yeah, Noa.” He practically growls at me, “You know better than to fight an Aburame with damaged chakra system -”

“A damaged chakra system?” Shino demands. Whoops, he was still here.

I would throw my hands up in exasperation if I could move on my own. “Yes, I did! And now I’m into the finals! It was just three kikaichu that landed on me, anyway! For less than ten minutes; that was barely any damage!”

Kakashi and Gai move until they’re looming over me menacingly, and I feel a trickle of apprehension. “Noa-hasu! You will be checked out by a medic immediately and then you will be restricted to bed rest until we find you in perfect health!”

I scoff, irritated now. “Perfect health, Gai? I’m dying - that ain’t going away.”

Silence.

Shit ... wait for it -

“Dying ?!” Multiple genin squeak out all at once.

“Note to self: Noa, remember your audience.” I mutter.

I glare back up at my two sensei (both of whom only seem to ever be able to work together to get me to do something I don’t want to). “You cannot restrict me to bed rest and you cannot make me
see a medic! I will be at a disadvantage if I don’t watch the rest of the preliminaries, and even more so if you confine me to bed rest. Shika can only hold this for another 45 seconds - tops. And you all forget how fast I’ve gotten."

Bluff - but still. I probably would head to the hospital later anyway, Mesuji made me promise. However, I would definitely give them a run for their money - my endurance was nothing to scoff at, especially these days.

Kakashi just laughs before crouching down annoyingly far to reach my eye level. As begins to form the beginning hand signs for a basic sleep inducing genjutsu - I shut my eyes tight.

“Oh come on! Really?”

I can feel the eye smile he gives me, but I keep my lids tight, refusing to allow him to put me in any form of genjutsu. Most those sleep types are eye-contact reliant.

Didn’t he know I needed to train?

Shikamaru’s jutsu drops in the next instant, and I’m moving the moment I feel the hold weaken. I may not be able to see or sense but I remember the layout and I can hear. Just need to get far enough away to -

All the wind in my body gets knocked out of me in an almighty ooph and my eyes shoot open reflexively.

I have less than a second to process how Choji - sweet, kind Choji - and Ino are somehow in front of me before they’re on either side of me, whipping me around to face Kurenai. I give them all a glare before nervously scanning the ground for any sign of Kakashi’s scuffed combat sandals, not daring to raise my eyes to look and risk eye contact.

I don’t see them right off but before I can really look I hear the snap of someone’s fingers and turn to the sound reflexively, only to lock eyes with Kurenai - a single hand of hers raised next to her cheek and her fingers still together.

Okay…?

Confusing, but I’m back to scanning the crowd in an instant, using a Gai-technique to break the Ino-Cho hold on me. I tense to run again, but there’s something wrong with my ears - there’s a weird deafening that’s throwing me off balance.

I stumble slightly, and then Lee’s there, holding me up. He looks grim - he’s got that face on when he has to do a mission that he doesn’t think is right, but has to do anyway because it’s his job. Like when he had to bodyguard this noble that -

Why am I off topic? Think, Noa. Get out of here before they confine you to bed rest!

I’m sick and tired of being injured all the time! I’m a medic in training, goddamnit! I should -

Focus! Why can’t I -?

Shit -

Kurenai is a genjutsu mistress - a specialist.

Can’t use chakra to break it, I have more self preservation than that, so I whip out a shuriken, a
downswing headed right to my leg and -

My hand gets stopped easily by Ruto’s tanned one, and Sasuke’s pale fingers firmly remove the throwing star from my hand.

Everything sounds far off, and my limbs begin to feel heavy with sleepy exhaustion. I groan, lurching out of Lee’s arms to rub at my eyes, determined to stay awake. “Would you people stop knocking me out? What if I ask nicely?”

I’m leaned against the railing, now, and Shino - kami even he’s in on this - helps Shika to ease me down until I’m sat on the ground.

Kurenai waves over a medic - one they obviously had put on standby - and they begin to rapidfire ask me questions that I had trouble really processing. As they begin to check a wound that I got on my leg, I turn to Shino. “Shino.” I call, forgetting the honorific. “Your sensei sucks - I hate her. Tell her that using genjutsu to force someone to see a medic is evil -”

The medic tending me apparently hears this (Cuz yeah Noa, you were so quiet) and actually laughs, sounding as if they were on the far side of a tunnel. “Oh, so that’s why you were so obedient. Yuuhi’s work, huh?”

“Evil. Evil woman. Horrible - her dress is so last season. You should tell her that she should just fork you over to Gai -”

“Maa maa, Chibi-chan.” Kakashi placates, squatting in front of me - I think, my vision is getting spotty - where did he even come from? “You should be nicer to Kurenai.”

I sigh explosively, relenting. “Yes, yes. Sorry. My bad, please forgive me. Now would you please break this genjutsu so I can get out of here? The medic can okay me now.”

He laughs - he actually laughs at me.

“Of course not, Noa-chan.” He manages between his shortles, “I won’t be breaking it - just adding another layer.”

“You wouldn’t -” I start, but am cut off by my vision going dark, leaving only a single red, tomoe-d eye. It spun lazily, and I forgot what I was going to say.

Distantly, I hear voices around me.

“...y Eternal Rival...was that truly...”

“Yes...necessary...she wouldn...”

“...Look after her, right?...”

“...course I...”

“...Take her...”

“...I’ll...”

But none of that matters, because the red is back and -

“Sleep, Noa-chan. We’ll wake you once you’ve rested.”
"Oi! Pervy Sage!"

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - Thoughts

In Text Bolded - Tailed Beast

AKIMICHI CHOJI

Most people look at the Akimichi as slow, fatass foodies who let the Nara do the thinking for them. But that wasn’t true no matter how much the kids at the Academy insisted it was. When I was younger and I brought up how the kids at the Academy were teasing me for something that just wasn’t true, Tou-san said something that I remember to this day.

‘Choji, there will always be the one who can hit harder, run faster, and think quicker than you, but that doesn’t matter. The Nara are always thinking about facts; the Yamanaka always about people. They are our sister clans for a reason: we are the bridge between the two.’

So I may not be the smartest or the best at knowing exactly what was going through someone’s head but I did know how to connect the dots. To take what Ino said in a hundred words and what Shikamaru said in ten and turn it into something workable, to know the right questions to ask.

So when dread coated Noa’s face when she heard that Kabuto guy talk, I saw Shikamaru take it in. When she pinned him to the ground, hissing in his face, I watched Ino analyze her every move. When we came across Team 7 in the Forest of Death, Ino had commented Shika on being nervous, more nervous than usual, I made a note of it. Ino’s little comment after we reached the Tower - ‘How could it be so bad that Noa used her chakra?’ - was carefully thought over.

Noa tried to run from medical help which Shikamaru wasn’t against using his family jutsu to force her to get. Kurenai-sensei, who I didn’t even know knew Noa, pinning her down with a genjutsu. Noa’s sensei uses a Sharingan to knock her out -

All of it I saw.

‘I’m dying - that ain’t going away.’

I put my bag of chips into my kunai pouch and pull Ino over to where Shika is slouching against the wall. He tears his gaze away from where a comatose Noa was getting an IV bag to look warily up at me.
“What is going on with Noa?”

UZUMAKI NARUTO

“The three of us made it into the final round.” Sasuke states without inflection, looking as tired as I felt.

I shake my head, trying to clear the cobwebs. “Yeah, well I don’t feel like celebrating.”

Noa’s room is small and more heavily armored than standard shinobi hospital rooms. There are at least three ANBU guards that I can sense, which would make sense considering we still have Orochimaru looming over us like a grey cloud. It was Goose, Mouse, and Lizard, so at least they got some good ones.’

Noa herself is in a Sharingan-induced coma on the room’s single bed. She’s got IV’s galore running into both of her arms, and a mask feeding her oxygen and Kami knows what else.

I groan, scratching at the dirt on the sole of my sandal. “When is Kaka-sensei going to wake her up, again?”

Sasuke massages his temples, attempting to keep a headache at bay, “In three days. By then her body will have expelled - hopefully - enough of Orochimaru’s chakra to be stable.”

“And until then,” Kakashi’s voice sounds behind us, forcing both Naruto and I to whip out kunai and face him. “We’re training.”

I trudge down the street, meandering through the Hot Spring District … not quite sure how I got there.

“Stupid Scarecrow teacher favoring stupid Bastard because ‘We’re training - But oh! I can’t train both of you at the same time - I’ll have to find someone to train you until then’ - BAH!” I grumble, seriously considering slamming my head through a hot spring wall.

Speaking of which -

“~ Oh ho ho ho ho ~”

Seriously what was with these perverts? I didn’t really care about them until Kiba tried to peek in when Nee-chan was in there!

And if I was mad about peeking on one girl then so many people must be mad about peeking on a bunch -

Well I can’t just leave it like this!

I pull a Noa and quick henge into an unassuming and mousy little girl. Deep breath and -

“Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeep ! There’s a creepy creepy man looking at those ladies! Kyaaaaaaah~~!”
I turn to run away, but not before catching a glimpse of a sleeveless red haori and stark white hair being pounded into the ground.

I swing back by a couple hours later out of pure morbid curiosity of what the old pervert would look like splattered on the pavement and was supremely disappointed to find him still at it (although a bit more bloodied).

Again, I henge into a girl; though this time an older looking, curvy version of Ino with deep Uchiha black hair. I make two Clones of myself to go around and flank the perv.

As they go around, I casually stroll up to the bath house only to stop dramatically in shock as I ‘spot’ the perv. I let out a small, feminine gasp as he whips around, eyes bulging at my very attractive feminine henge.

Just as he’s about to do something lecherous, my clones grabbed his arms and began to drag him out of the bath house, scowling. He begins protesting loudly and accidently pops one of my clones so I quickly form three more.

My apparent ease with the Shadow Clone technique is enough to surprise him, and he stops struggling long enough for the four clones plus my original henge-d form to toss him out of the street on his ass.

I look down and scowl at him, dropping the henge in a puff of smoke.

“What the hell?” I demand of him, furious. “Seriously! If my Nee-chan was in there, I would’ve killed you not just dragged you out of there!”

Something about this entire situation must’ve just freaked this guy out because he was just on the ground in shock, doing nothing but stare completely silently. I groan and massage my temples.

“Who even are you?” I asked, gesturing to his hitai-ate which totally unhelpfully had the kanji for ‘oil’ inscribed on it.

Great. Now he looks offended. Not offended when I kick him out on his ass or drag him using a henge as a lure - but not knowing him? Nooooooooooooooo.

“Thanks for asking!” He exclaims dramatically, summoning a rather large toad out of nowhere for no reason. “Mt. Myoboku’s Holy Master Sage, also known as the Toad Hermit - remember it!”

‘Cue awkward silence,’ as Nee-chan would say.

“You realize that I still don’t know your name, right?”

He blinks - surprised, as if he honestly didn’t realize that he missed such a key part of an introduction. “Jiraiya. Name’s Jiraiya.”

“Well then, Jiraiya.” I begin, leaking out Ki. “I’m not happy right now so you might want to back off with the perving, neh?”

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JIRAIYA
“Oi! Pervy Sage!”

I glance up from giggling at a rather ... well endowed ... young woman, and turn, a scowl in place at the nickname.

Oh. It was Minato’s kid.

Naruto.

I should’ve been there for him, growing up. I just want to sweep him up in a huge hug - sit him on my knee and apologize and tell him about his father.

But I can’t.

Damn Sensei’s stupid laws.

“What do you want, brat?” I growl, fighting to keep any fondness out of my voice.

When I first ran into him two days ago, I was struck by just how much like Minato he was. When he tossed me out on the street, he had worn the same expression Minato would when he was still alive.

He scowls at me in irritation, and jumps down from the tree he sushined into - and wasn’t that impressive? Kushina didn’t have that much chakra control at his age.

“Don’t give me that, Pervy Sage! I need your help.”

I freeze for just a moment.

‘Don’t give me that, Sensei. I need your help here!’

“What do you want, brat?” I manage, “I don’t even know your name!”

He gives an explosive sigh, “Naruto, Uzumaki Naruto. I need you to help with a seal.”

Wait, what?!

“Oi, brat -what are we doing in a hospital? I thought you wanted me to look at a seal?”

He ignores me as we reach a secures hospital wing, where standing like centurion were the Last Uchiha and the Hatake brat.

It is Kakashi that answers me, “Because the seal, or rather seals, we want you to take a look at are on a person.”

The Uchiha looks at me warily, remaining stoic as he glared, but doesn’t protest when Naruto nudges him to the side to allow our collective entry.

Laying on the single bed was a tiny girl with distinctly foreign features. She didn’t look injured, merely unconscious, but there was a certain amount of weariness in her frame that even sleep couldn’t hide.

“We want to wake her up today, but would rather have a seal master on standby; imagine my
surprise when Naruto came to me complaining about a perverted hermit at the bath houses.”

I glance calculatively at Kakashi. So he was Naruto’s jounin-sensei? At least he had that much. But if this was Naruto’s sensei, that meant that these two kids were his genin teammates.

The Last Uchiha, the Nine-Tails Jinchuriki, and a foreign girl.

What was Hiruzen-sensei thinking?

I glance askance at Kakashi and nod. He smiles at me in thanks and steps to her bedside, lifting his hitai-ate and a single one of her eyelids muttering ‘kai’ in a low voice.

I give a start of surprise when he immediately jumps back to avoid a well aimed kick at his kidneys. Part of me is impressed with the response time a mere genin has even after being under an apparently Sharingan induced coma for Kami knows how long, but the most of me is more confused by the slew of foreign words flying like water bullets out of this tiny girl’s mouth.

“-abuse of power - level of trust - you had no RIGHT - I don’t need you to -”

And on she goes. We must’ve been there for at least ten minutes, just listening to this tiny girl cuss out her sensei - who in his defense was just standing there and taking it - and later her two teammates.

After she manages to elicit what sounded like promises from Kakashi and apologies from the boys, she takes a much needed deep breath and flopped down on the bed.

“And does anyone want to tell me why there’s a Sannin in my room?”

Silence and expectant looks thrown my way. Great, throw me under the bus, why don’t you.

“I’m here to look at your seals, brat.”

At that she props herself up, fixing her rather luminous light eyes on me calculatively. “Seals? What, the five point and the Cursed Seal of whatever your old buddy slapped-slash-bit me with?”

A bolt of shock runs through me, and I whip around to face Kakashi, mouth gaping. The girl keeps staring, but begins to deftly braid her hair through the awkward silence.

“Aaaaah!” She suddenly realizes, “You didn’t know that your old pedophile of a teammate gave me a chakra hickey. Fun.”

Now I’m staring at her, “Chakra hickey?”

She just blinks at me, flicking her braid over her shoulder. “Yeah. That’s basically what it is: a hickey made of his fucked up chakra. Can we get this over with, Mr. Discount Legendary Ninja?”

I narrow my eyes at her, “That had better not be an insult, brat -”

She just shrugs before leaping deftly off the bed. “You tell me, Pervy Sage. You tell me.”

“Fine.” I decide to ignore her casual use of a completely alien language for now. “Now lift up your shirt, I’ll get rid of that seal first.”

The brat - I should probably learn her name - just rolls her eyes before hiking up her shirt, gesturing to a skinny but completely empty stomach.
“Channel your chakra into it, kid.”

My back is immediately fixed with two very pint sized glares, but the girl just rolls her eyes. “I can’t genius, chakra system’s shot. You’ll have to add your own if you want a look at it.”

My questions about this girl only multiplying, I reach out a single palm onto her sternum - channeling a minuscule amount of chakra into her system.

Now, I may not be a medic like Tsunade but you hang around one enough and you pick up a few things. So when I channeled chakra into this stick-thin concentration of sass, I noticed three things right off the bat. One, this girl’s chakra system wasn’t just shot - it was decimated . Second, I could feel Orochimaru’s sickeningly familiar chakra lodged in her neck but there was less of it than I had expected. And third -

“How are you even standing ?”

“How?” Is her only response, evidently not realizing how damaging the Snake-Bastard’s seal was.

“What do you mean?” The Uchiha demands, worry straining his voice.

I don’t even care to process the question as I squat down, staring with sick fascination at the five-point seal still visible on her stomach.

“Oi! Pervy Sage! Answer the teme, what’s wrong?”

I glance up at this suddenly far more impressive girl, “What’s your name.”

She blinks at the spontaneousness of my question, “Noa.”

“No clan name?”

She sighs longsufferingly, “Tsubasa. Bastard child.”

Oh.

“Well, Noa - this seal is screwing with your chakra big time.” I explain as my fingers glow with chakra, “It’s making your chakra sporadic, chaotic. I wouldn’t think that Orochimaru would hit you with something this extreme if he was planning on marking you.”

And without further ado, I slam my hand into Noa’s stomach, the seal fading.

She coughs, the air knocked out of her, and tugs her shirt back down, “He wasn’t, for either. I took the five-point blow for Naruto, and he originally planned only to gun for Sasuke. I wasn’t a person of interest until our fight.”

Huh.

Damn.

TSUBASA NOA

I try to ignore how freaking tall Jiraiya was as he squatted down, examining my Snake Hickey. After a few minutes he whistles lowly, tugging my collar back into place. “How the hell did you
manage to get so much of Orochimaru’s chakra out of your system? If you hadn’t been hit with a five-point like you did you would’ve dispelled him completely!”

Oh great - I could’ve been rid of this shit, but I had to play hero, didn’t I?

Ah well, at least Sasuke won’t defect and Ruto didn’t win by farting.

I roll my shoulders, trying to get the crick of it out - stupid sleeping in the same position for three days -

“Tsubasa bloodline limit.” I explain dryly, “I can expel a shit ton of chakra pretty much anytime, anywhere. I just barricaded and expelled the chakra before it could, I dunno, take root I guess.”

He nods thoughtfully, “Well if you wanted to you could take the time to expel the rest of it now, just push it out like a splinter.”

I pause, considering the merits of actually doing that and -

“Oh hell no.”

I have never heard Kakashi that angry -

“You are not using any more chakra, Nee-chan!”

Or Ruto, for that matter.

I can only glare at them, “Do you think I like dying? Hell no! I’m not suicidal! Back off!”

But Kakashi isn’t having any of it, “No, you're not suicidal. You’re just reckless - you fought a Aburame -”

“Only three kikaichu got on me -”

“13!” Sasuke bellows, radiating fury. “I talked to Shino. He said that he managed to get 13 on you before the match ended!”

“13?” That doesn’t make sense. “But -”

“They were clustered in groups \, you were too busy to notice.” Kakashi growled. “And your time got docked. You’re down to 11 months, Noa.”

Well fuck -
Jiraiya left eventually, but only after swindling Kakashi into letting him prepare Ruto for the finals.

Speaking of …

“What are the finals looking like?”

Kakashi blinks and seems to remember how it was right after my match that he and Kurenai knocked me out. “It’s a simple tournament, fight until someone wins. You just have to show your aptitude, not necessarily win the whole thing, to become a chunin.”

“I’m up against Gaara, the last of the first round. The winner of our match goes against either Temari or Shikamaru.” Sasuke chips in, significantly less stressed now that I’m up and about.

“You and I are in the same bracket!” Ruto practically shouts, enthusiasm to fight against me practically pouring off of him. “I’m against Neji first and then the winner of the second match - either you or Lee - goes against Kankuro. Then the winner of that goes either against me or Neji - gut it’s gonna be me!”

“Wait - I’m fighting Lee?”

We’re exiting the hospital when Kakashi brings up his little problem.

“I don’t think it’s fair to train both you and Sasuke, for either of you.”

Saw that coming.

“Don’t worry about it, Teach.” I smile up at him. “I’ll find someone to teach me.”

He only continues to frown, rubbing at his masked chin in worry. “Who though? I’ve got Sasuke, Naruto is with Jiraiya. Lee and Gai are pretty much attached at the hip, and Anko and Ibiki are proctors for the Exams. Who will you go to?”
I shrug, having been wondering the same thing.

“What do you want to focus on?”

Now that is a loaded question.

“Taijutsu,” I answer immediately, though I pause to think about what else. “I wouldn’t mind more work on my kenjutsu - poison too. Could stand to work on endurance and flexibility. Aim too.”

Kakashi only hums thoughtfully, so I shrug and head over to Ino’s family shop to get some good ‘ol toxic plants.

The next morning there’s someone in my room.

I lash out at the figure, mind rushing through my options. Can’t use chakra - don’t have the time. Orochimaru wouldn’t have come himself - but maybe Kabuto. Sound Four? It isn’t Gai - he’s with Lee and he’s always louder. Brown hair - not Kakashi.

I’ve a sai in each hand as I lunge at the figure, intercepting a katana’s downswing close enough to cut off it’s momentum. The figure lunges back, disengaging from my and getting out of the way of one of my kicks.

I’m forced to lean to the left as a barrage of - *senbon*? - cut through the air where I just was. I can’t handle this on my own, they’re ANBU or jounin level at least. I suck in a breath to yell at the top of my lungs but -

The attacker’s fist is in my stomach and all the air is knocked out of me.

“Well then,” The figure says, and odd clacking sound accompanying each syllable. “Guess Kakashi was right: you’re good, but you do need my help.”

He - the voice is male and totally unfamiliar - backs up and flicks on my light, exposing a tall figure with a senbon between his teeth and his hitai-ate in the style of a bandana, the metal plate exposed only as her turns abruptly and exists without a sound.

Holy *shit* -

Shiranui Genma was not an easygoing sensei.

As a guy? Totally laid back - wouldn’t get flustered if everyone around him suddenly decided to streak naked and eat rocks. He’d probably just shrug and go back to flirting with whatever nearby girl - or guy for that matter - caught his fancy.

But for training? I’m pretty sure the guy used to be or is ANBU - so his standards are far more like Kakashi’s than Kurenai’s.

My month could be boiled down to kenjutsu with various blades, being expected to hit tiny and obscure targets with actually anything, having all manor of senbon chucked at my head at every spare moment, and poison.
Poison.

It took me a couple days to pick up on the underlying tension all the Jonin I came across seemed to have. It took me a week to remember that Gekko Hayate should’ve been caught spying by now but for so reason was most likely alive and well.

Genma was the one to take over as proctor after Hayate died in the other story. The fact that he could unbiasedly be my sensei while Anko and Ibiki couldn’t? Yep. Hayate is either alive or someone decided to take over for Genma.

And based on the sheer amount of tension in the air my paranoia with Kabuto lead to Ibiki doing something. A ‘something’ enough to either discover the invasion plan before it affected Hayate or to save Hayate when he discovered the plot.

“Hey, Genma.”

Clack. “Yeah, kid?”

“Will Hayate-san be down in the arena during the fights? Or will he be elevated?”

“Down there with you, kid. Don’t kill him off, yeah? I like that guy.”

“I’m telling Raido your cheating on him.”

“- you little brat - we are not dating!”

“Hey Gaara!”

I wave enthusiastically at my (hopefully) friend-to-be, sure that if I was just sheerly baffling enough then I would be safe from Shukaku’s fury (at least until Ruto could beat some sense into the both of them.)

See? It was already working on Kankuro and Temari!

“Noa.” He greets back, painfully neutral in his too-deep voice.

“I’m not going to ask for details, but how’s your training for the finals going? I’m practically dead on my feet myself!”

Silence.

I decide to just wait out the awkwardness, figuring that if I let Gaara work through what he wants his answer to be he’ll get it out eventually. Kankuro looks like he’s waiting for the fallout, and Temari looks torn between telling me to run or just sitting back and figuring out how to explain this to the Leaf.
Gaara eventually decides on what to say, although with a slight undercurrent of uncertainty, “Well. I am already skilled, so I do not need extra help.”

(Kankuro needs a better poker face. Temari too, for that matter.)

“Lucky!” I laugh, “But maybe you’ll still find that you still have something to learn? What aren’t you that good at? Maybe you can use the next week to get a bit better at your weak points.”

Gaara seems to actually think about that, “I would say taijutsu. Or genjutsu.”

I nod absentmindedly, running through some widespread taijutsu styles that I knew. “Genjutsu makes sense - you do have a lot of chakra. Taijutsu, taijutsu … Have you heard of the style of aikido? It’s largely defensive based, using momentum against your opponents. It’s newer than most and there aren’t as many people using it, but it is samurai in origin so I can recommend it without being executed for treason.”

Gaara actually seems to be considering this - sweet!

Kankuro sputters at the thought of his little brother getting any more powerful, and Temari is staring me down, searching for any tricks. I simply smile at them, tilting my head.

“Temari and … Kankuro, right? You’re on Gaara’s genin team, with Baki as your sensei - right?”

“Ah - yes,” Temari answers, rather timid for a 15 year old wind mistress who could cut me down if she sneezed too hard. “And you are Tsubasa Noa?”

“Yup.” I pop my ‘p,’ glancing at the still befuddled Kankuro. “I really like your uniform - Puppeteer Corps, right? I admire that, I can use -” (could use) “- chakra strings but it’s not my favorite - and a pain in the ass! You figured out how to get them to produce from, like, your nose yet? I figured it out on a dare - thought I’d never use it. Saved my damn life, that did.”

Kankuro comes out of his shock to look genuinely interested, “How the hell did you manage that? The control must be murder.”

“It is!” I giggle, mood lightening as the tension leaked out of the air. “I had to do movements like nose scrunching - ya know, rabbit nose - and stuff like that. Looks ridiculous but it's seriously worth it -”

A low thump from the street behind me cuts me off mid sentence, followed soon after by a familiar, exasperated call.

“Noa! What the hell?”

“Oops!” I turn to see a very irritated Shikamaru flanked by an extremely concerned Asuma. “Heya Stag! How’s training? Oh, hi Asuma. You guys headed to restock at Tenten’s family shop like me or is this just a coincidence?”

“Coincidence? You said you’d come over for a Shogi match after you came back from that training trip.” Shikamaru grumbles, eyeing the Suna nin, who looked very uncomfortable having so many chunin candidates in one spot, distrustfully. “What are you doing here?”

The ‘Talking to them?’ is left unspoken.

Well. If it isn’t spoken - I can’t hear it.
“Headed to restock up on gear, like I said. And training trip? Genma took me to Training Ground 44 for like, a week. That’s not a trip if I’m still in-village.”

Temari cuts in, surprise obviously overtaking her nervousness at the new arrivals. “The Forest of Death? You went back there?”

I laugh at the hilarity of her expression, “What, you though all Leaf nin were a bunch of tree-hugging pacifists? No way! I get mad I go beat up a couple tigers!

“You know our proctor - the one with the purple hair - Anko? She’s the one who first showed it to me; she and I spent 48 hours on-end killing every single centipede we could find because the population grew too large.”

Based off the expressions of the foreign nin (minus Gaara’s lack of any) I think I gained their respect, if only just a little.

“Well!” I clap my hands once, breaking the lull in conversation. “I honestly wish that I could stay and chat a little longer - you guys are awesome - but Tenten’s family shop closes like, five minutes ago, so see you around! Bye Asuma, Shikamaru! Nice to meet you Kankuro, Temari. See you around again, Gaara!

And then I sprint full tilt to the weapons district.
A WALL OF GLASS - PART ONE

Chapter Summary

And just as soon as it started - it ended.

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - Thoughts

In Text Bolded - Tailed Beast

TSUBASA NOA

I look up at the sheer mass of people in the stadium for the Exams. Diplomats, village leaders, merchants, ninja, kage -

But most importantly: Jiraiya is in the Kage Box. Jiraiya in the Kage Box means that Orochimaru disguised as the Kazekage has less range of movement; to get the Sandaime alone he would have to somehow lure Jiraiya away from the box.

Which is both harder and easier than it sounds.

I still don’t know what Ruto did to convince him to see his match but I think it had something to do with promises to put up with further training. Hell, I’m not complaining. Ruto should learn all the sealing and ninjutsu he can before the Akatsuki come after him.

Plus, it was his heritage.

I glance over at my competition, gauging. Neji and Ruto are first up - simple enough: Neji may be good in this life but Ruto is even better this time around and even more determined.

I’m up against Lee after, a match that many are looking forward to seeing as it is a rare match of trained shinobi fighting completely without chakra. The winner of that goes against Kankuro after all of the first round bouts - which he may just forfeit based off the original story. Or we many never get that far. That’s more likely.

Temari and Shikamaru is a toss up that depends on if Shika decides to actually push to win the match, which actually might happen based on this newfound motivation he pulled out of nowhere.

Then Sasuke vs Gaara. The match that everyone is looking forward to and the cue to start the invasion.

This is gonna be ‘fun’.

“Good morning, Temari!” I chirp to the wind kunoichi stood next to me at the railing. She seems
bemused and a little guilty for some reason - was it ‘cuz she was going to invade my village and try to kill my friends? Actually, that does sound like a good reason to be guilty...

“Good morning, Tsubasa-san.” Temari returns, if a bit warily.

I wave off the honorific and formalities, “None of that. Call me Noa - I was a ‘Noa’ before I was a ‘Tsubasa.’”

She tilts her head, seemingly searching me for something. “Alright then, Noa.”

I beam at her, “I’d wish you good luck in your match, but you’re up against my Shika so…”

Temari actually smirks at that, her head tilted teasingly. “Your Shika? My my, Noa-chan. Going after the Nara heir so soon?”

Caught off guard, I start spluttering unattractively as the man (boy) himself walks up.

“Someone say my name?” He asks blandly, yawning into his hand, far too used to my craziness to be bothered by me putting my foot in my mouth all but literally.

Temari just smiles at him innocently, “Of course not, we were just discussing how Noa-chan here was-”

“Temari!” I nearly whine, finally recovered. “This is so not cool - I thought we were friends!”

The eldest of the late Kazekage’s children freezes, Kankuro and a nearby Asuma turning to give me weird looks with Baki flat out glaring.

Attempting a smile, Temari swallows thickly, “Of course we are, Noa. I’m just teasing.”

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**SARUTOBI HIRUZEN**

The genin this year are quite impressive.

Naruto especially has grown much over the years. His skill as an on the spot tactician and fighter have improved greatly. I’m proud of him.

“That kid has spunk,” Jiraiya comments, leaning casually on the side of my rather uncomfortable throne-like chair. “I only taught him three of those elemental jutsus - the two fuuton and the doton. Don’t know where he pulled that raiton from.”

I smile at that, and have to hide my wide grin when Hayate calls the match. Orochimaru planning to invade with the aid of Suna or not, it all almost seemed worth it to see Naruto prove himself.

The Kazekage seems to sit up a little straighter as both Rock Lee and little Noa-chan enter the arena.

“Something spike your interest, Kazekage-sama?” I ask, mild as milk.

The man merely shrugs loosely, body language inscrutable. “I have heard that is is to be a high energy match with no chakra. I was merely curious as to why, considering the Tsubasa Clan’s … reputation.”

“Well, we shall see.” I reply noncommittally.
Noa versus Lee. I didn’t know who to root for.

Lee was my teammate - he was always there, always excitable. Working together with him for nearly two years made me appreciate his little quirks and odd challenges - they were something I always knew would be there. Like the sun setting or the moon changing. A standard. A fact.

But Noa was my first friend. We were serious kunoichi, the both of us, and we did it together. Noa was the one who helped me with my new weapons designs. Noa was the one who went shopping for gear when puberty decided to kick us in the chest (pretty much literally). Noa was the one who came to me when she needed sai forged in steel rather than chakra.

And now my teammate was going to fight my friend for something the both of them dreamed of.

She couldn’t pick sides - she wouldn’t.

“Noa-hasu! This will be a most fantastic and youthful match!” Lee cheered, voice carrying easily over the assembled audience.

She laughs, voice rough and true and genuine rather than many other girls’ little giggles - I’d always admired that. “I look forward to it, Lee! Don’t hold back!”

Lee would’ve almost managed to look offended had he not been so excited. “Of course not, Noa-hasu! I will fight all out if you will!”

“Deal.”

“Deal!”

And the match began.

The arena was a flurry of movement, blurs fighting and colliding too fast for anything short of a Sharingan to see clearly. A minute passed, and the two of them broke up, each barely winded.

“As always, Noa-hasu! Sparring you is most youthful!”

Noa grins maniacally, “Say we kick it up a notch?”

At Lee’s enthusiastic nod and some unspoken cue, Lee strips off his leg warmers and dropped his weights to the ground. Many of the audience seem confused until the weights hit and see the sizable crater left in its wake.

Noa laughs at the crowd, ever amused, and strips off her shin and forearm guards - throwing four sets of weights, each creating dents near the size of Lee’s.

Now it is Lee’s turn to laugh as he eyes the craters appreciatively. “Most impressive Noa-hasu! Most impressive!”

They share twin grins - both a bit mad and both a bit feral.

“Let’s do this.”
I know something is wrong when Lee stops to catch his breath.

Lee can go on for hours with his weights on and not even sweat - but that he was panting, looking pale?

Something was up.

They continue on, Lee eventually sporting two kunai as Noa pulls out a beautiful tanto from kami-knows-where. The fight is longer than even Naruto going up against Neji, which seemed from the stands to just mostly be them arguing with each other.

It hits me just as Lee vocalizes it, his voice distinctly absent of any ‘youth.’

“Poison. You poisoned me.”

Noa almost looked apologetic, but settled for a respectful head nod. “Yes. I was sure only to start after the 30 minute mark - I hoped that enough time to demonstrate your skills.”

Lee nodded, turning to the proctor. “I yield. If I continue at this rate, the poison will only spread further and I do not have the experience necessary to detox.”


“No round: Temari versus Nara Shikamaru.”

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**TSUBASA NOA**

Shika’s match went very similar to the one that I remember, only he didn’t forfeit.

At some point between Temari dodging the vest-kunai-parachute and Shika snagging her in his shadow through the hole that Ruto made in his rather destructive match, the Nara genius of an heir managed to jury rig a catapult in the tree - sending a rather large chunk of rock straight into the waiting kunoichi’s head.

Shika got his head snapped back rather quickly and suffered from a bit of whiplash but he still won the match.

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“Kakashi. Gai.” I call to the two rivals lowly, wary of alerting those around me. I pause, unsure of what to say, “I feel like … I mean … something is up … just - be careful.”

The two of them study me carefully, no doubt noting my tense posture and the way I kept unconsciously glancing up towards the Kage Box and the nearby ANBU guards.

“Okay.” Kakashi amends, voice equally low. “Only if you will.”
Sasuke was at a disadvantage after not seeing Gaara fight before. Luckily, Kakashi seemed to have at least some level of ESP meaning that the paranoid bastard taught him the chidori anyway.

When the feathers start falling, I already have a shuriken in hand - the pain of jabbing it into my leg releasing any hold the genjutsu had on me.

The stadium is dead silent until a sudden flurry of movement all at once -

An Oto nin is behind me, and I lash out instinctively - downing them in a moment. I feel a comfortable pressure against my back, and glance behind me to see Stag, kunai in hand, leaning up against me - us back to back. Him having my back.

The fight was short and bloody, Stag trapping someone with his shadows as I end them. Two, three, four, five, ten, twenty. The numbers blurred.

The sensation of shoving my tanto through the nin’s necks didn’t -

And just as soon as it started - it ended.

“Ruto! Shika! Take Shino and Sasuke and go after Gaara and his siblings! If he loses control we’re all dead!” I bark out, ignoring the looks of confusion I was getting from my two senseis.

“Hai.” My boys chime out, grabbing Shino and Sushin-ing down to the arena.

I turn to face the roof where the barrier seal just went up and curse in every language I knew extensively. As the jounin turn to face the roof in the distance, I curse my soft heart even more forcefully.

I know that if I do nothing now and lived to see the aftermath, then I’d never forgive myself for letting Ruto’s Jiji die.

So I pull out two senbon - paralytics that Genma gave me. A way to win my match at the last minute if I thought that I needed a quick out.

Five minutes. They last five minutes. I can do five minutes - that’s more than enough time for the bat-shit crazy idea I have.

So I stab the two jounin who made me who I am today, cringing at the sound of surprise they release - gently kissing each of them on the cheek in turn.

Ignoring their attempts to protest through the fast acting agent, I take a moment to drink in their faces for what could be the last time -

And a mere second passes before I Sushin away.
Arriving on the roof was easy. Getting the two ANBU standing by and watching to let me anywhere near the barrier seal -

That was different.

“Genin-san. Do not approach the barrier seal! It will kill you!”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence - also, you said that like three times already.”

Soooooo … after figuring I wasted enough of my 5 minutes, I Sushin to the other side of the building before they can stop me.

Deep breath.

I discovered when Orochimaru decided to give me a chakra hickey that I had the ability to affect chakra that was forced inside my system and redirect it. I managed it with Orochimaru’s chakra and I would have to do it again today.

I strip off my gloves and close my eyes, reaching out my chakra senses for the first time in months - feeling how the barrier was made. What affinities. More yin or more yang? What did it feel like?

I feel those around me clearly. I feel Shukaku’s chakra fluctuating, fighting, right alongside Ruto and the Fox - their power like beacons in the night. I feel Jiraiya at the village gates summoning Gamabunta and protecting our borders. And I feel my own chakra wavering, dying.

I feel calm, knowing my own death.

There was something wrong with that, right? I wasn’t supposed to feel so sure -

I know this is the only way.
I know that I have to do this and that the Sandaime will die if I don’t.

I hold no love for the man - he has caused more trouble than he’s worth, in my view.

...

Yet I’m going to die for him.

Why?

Hell if I know.

I reach out my hands and place them on the surface of the barrier, shocked by the rush of chakra that I felt. Without hesitation I begin pulling -

I know my chakra system well. I knew it before it was damaged and I know it after - and I knew how much I could take. That limit, one I had carefully tested and surpassed many times in my life, I now completely disregard.

No needs for limits in death.

With an almighty rip I suck all the chakra that made the barrier into my own system. Half of what my body was doing was purely instinctual but I feel it all - pulling and sucking and destroying the barrier bit by bit by bit -

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**SHIRANUI GENMA**

I liked Noa. She’s a good kid, a hard worker. She took a death sentence and turned it into a goal, an endpoint she would be proud of.

So when my student - if only for a month - landed on the roof while I was in uniform, I had tried to stop her from approaching the barrier. But she didn’t know - didn’t trust - ANBU Boar, so I had been ignored.

By the time I and ANBU Bat landed behind her she had placed her hands onto the barrier and began changing - manipulating - it. Bat moved to approach her, but I held out a single arm to stop her.

‘Let her,’ I signaled to them in ANBU signs, wary but realistic enough to realize that my one and only student was our only chance to get the barrier down, what with Jiraiya-sama dealing with the giant fucking snake summons outside the village gates.

For better or for worse, Orochimaru and Sandaime-sama were too distracted to notice what Noa was up to at first - but as soon as they did, three things happened all at once -

Orochimaru summoned the Shodaime and Nidaime Hokage. Kakashi and Gai were suddenly there on the roof - anger and fear radiating off their coiled frames and -

The barrier fell, shattering like a wall of glass.
TSUBASA NOA

Everything hurts.

It’s not even that painful, really. More of an abstract fact - I am in pain.

I blacked out - must’ve - because when my senses return to me, ANBU Boar, ANBU Bat, and Gai-sensei are blocking Orochimaru from reaching two unmoving revived Kage - which apparently have batteries not included thankgodforthat - and Kakashi and the Sandiame are bearing down on The Snake Bastard.

A figure comes up behind me, KI leaking out like a motherfucking waterfall and I just think: ‘Fuckit.’

Using the chakra pilfered from Orochimaru’s barrier seal I lash out and impale Kabuto on a pair of wings so heartbreakingly beautiful tears come to my eyes -

This is right - this feels right -

‘- I should’ve had these -’

But I’m distracted, and the damn Snake-Pedophile takes advantage of it. He tries to grab me, his hands glowing with some jutsu I do not want to be on the receiving end of - but I fold my wings around myself, a protective shield of chakra -

He collides with my wings and in that instant - in that split second - I push. As much chakra as I could manage in that millisecond is forced into his system, eating away at his chakra channels like acid, eating away from his flesh like fire -

The impact of the Sannin colliding with my wings forces him back in tandem with a cry of pain and surprise. As I unfurl them, preparing to bare down on the cause of so much misery -

Both him and Kabuto disappear in twin puffs of chakra dust.

HATAKE KAKASHI

Noa looks like an avenging angel.

When she pulled that stunt - when she kissed us goodbye -

It was Rin all over again.

No - it was Obito all over again - it was Minato-sensei all over again.

When we arrived on the roof to find that Chibi-chan managed to pull down an entire barrier - possibly saving the Sandiame’s life - I was full of pride and anger and sorrow in equal measure.

And fear. So much fear.
When the Snake Sannin and his little spy managed to get away, there was a moment of pure stillness. Time stopped. With Noa in the middle of it all.

She had always been small. She had always been skinny. She had always been … Noa.

But as her eyes glowed silver and meter long wings sprouted from her shoulder blades in magnificent silver and sapphire chakra - her anger at the loss of her prey was terrifying -

“Fuck. This.”

Her voice cracked like a whip and she rounded on the Sandaime, “You are the leader of a military dictatorship. Fucking act like it .”

The Sandaime was taken aback - and a little insulted - but Noa was not finished, “You should've retired years ago.”

“Noa-hasu!” Gai exclaimed, trying to intervene. “You’re talking to -”

“I know very well who I’m talking to, Gai!” She snarls, voice sounding very much like a bird of prey. “But I just used up the last of the chakra my body was capable of holding in order to save his sorry ass so the least he could do is fucking listen !

“You are a leader - or at least you were supposed to be! You should’ve stayed retired, Hiruzen, because if I had not been here you would’ve died - killed by your prodigy and your own damn predecessors.

“You have gone soft. I get it - you don’t want war - no one fucking does, okay! But this?” She gestures around, “This is what happens when you turn the other way. Bare the other cheek. Orochimaru should’ve died for his crimes! Hell, if anyone else had done what he did they would be six feet under - except for maybe fucking Danzo , but he’s a whole ‘nother deal, isn’t he?

“You refuse to see reason when it comes to those you care about! Orochimaru walked all over you and now he’s gunning for my head and killing innocent people because you couldn’t deal with a traitor you made your goddamn self -”

Noa cuts herself off, breathing heavily. The Sandaime stays silent.

“And, ya know? While we’re at it? As a military dictator you should’ve been able to keep an S-Class secret - I dunno - secret ?”

The Hokage gives a start of surprise, but Noa has no mercy.

“Namikaze-Uzumaki Naruto is the kindest, most loving person I have ever had the honor of meeting and you almost broke him. You put a watch on him, sure. You talked to him every week, sure. But goddamn it you did not see what he was going through ! It’s a fucking miracle that he didn’t turn out a psychopath like Gaara - you all certainly treated him horribly enough for that -”

She takes a steadying breath, ragged and completely failing at calming her down.

“He has been beaten and starved and harassed and ostracized and rejected and sabotaged and discriminated against and hurt and abandoned by so many people - just because you made that goddamn law and you decided to let an S-Class secret loose! I may have never known Yondaime-sama - but he would have never-”

A ragged breath. Another useless calming breath.
“Do you know where Naruto and I met?” She starts again, voice low and furious. “He was being beaten and on the way to being *raped* in the red light district - the orphanage kicked him out because he was ‘self-sufficient’.

“He was four - where were you then, Hiruzen? *Where were you then*?”

I feel my own anger rising - that was *Minato-sensei’s son* -

“This invasion only happened because the rest of the world can *smell* how damn *rotten* Konoha has gotten!” Noa growls, “The civilians are discriminatory and distrustful, the clans corrupt and full of infighting - and I’m pretty sure the Hyuuga seal could be used to cover up treason and *rape* if they wanted to. And - to top it *ALL OFF* - the council is more controlled from the shadows than the fucking *Suna Puppeteer Corps* and your elders are betraying horrible flaming *pieces of shit* -

“You. Are not fit. To be. Hokage.”

---

The roof has emptied (the Sandaime eventually leaving the silent roof to end the invasion, taking ANBU Boar and Bat with him) save for myself, Gai, Noa, and the crumbled remains of two Oto nin sacrificed for the attempt at Edo Tensei.

Noa’s wings are fading, the glow in her eyes dying. She stumbles, close to falling off the edge, but I catch her - holding her close.

“*You idiot,*” I whisper, holding her head gently to my chest. “*You moron.*”

She laughs weakly, smiling up at us. “*Sorry boys.* Had to do something.”

Her laugh dies off and Gai draws level with us, the two of us practically chest to chest - Noa the only thing between us. She’s tipping close to the edge, and with one - miraculously, mystifyingly - steady hand Gai supports her neck for her.

Like a child.

She is a child.

“You knew?” I can’t help but ask.

About Naruto? About the fox? About his parents?

She scoffs, painfully. “Of course I knew - I’m amazing.”

“Can’t deny that, Noa-hasu.” Gai assures, his youthful energy gone. “And you didn’t care?”

She smiles, bright as sunshine. “Ruto is Ruto - no matter what he hosts or who his parents were.”

“I’ll tell him you said that,” I promise, only half joking.

The silence stretched on.

“I’m sorry for dying.” She croaks out, her voice rough and thick with tears.

And kami her voice is so young.
I swallow a lump in my throat, “You’re not dead yet.”

The hospital is crowded - too crowded. Too many injured.

One nurse directs us to another, then that one to another, and finally to a doctor - who leaves to fetch the hospital head.

Time is ticking bye.

Each second the hospital head isn’t here is another piece of myself that I feel I am losing -

Silence yawns - stretching far, too far. Noa’s eyes flutter, the events of the day finally kicking in.

“Sleep, imoto.” Gai murmurs into her hair, barely audible.

“Iai, Nii-san.” She coarsely whispers back, tears in her voice - either from the pain or the title. Little sister.

I help her settle down onto the rough hospital cot. Even the smallest movement forces her to gasp and I reach up to lift my hitai-ate. I’m prepared to knock her out, to allow her to … rest in peace -

She catches my movement, and gives me a smile so heartbreakingly accepting my breath catches in my throat -

“Goodnight, Kakashi-nii-san.”

Obito’s Sharingan spinning - my own eye crying - I can only barely answer her, “Goodnight, imouto.”

The genjutsu takes hold, her consciousness fading - eyes closed with tension easing from her frame - and I can’t let go of her. I won’t. Not yet.

Not now, not ever.
Chapter Summary

Noa - ‘from love.’

_Underlined - English_

_Italicised’ - Thoughts_

_In Text Bolded - Tailed Beast_

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**UZUMAKI NARUTO**

I gently lay Noa down on the inn bed, removing Jiraiya’s haori from around her shoulders before tucking her under the sheets.

I take a moment - just a second - to sigh and roll out my shoulders, tension from carrying my sister slowly easing from my coiled muscles.

But the moment passes, and then I’m retrieving the medical kit Mesuji-san gave us before we left, removing an IV bag and two pills. Hooking her up, I unscrew the lid to my canteen and gently coax her into drinking them down.

She’s been like this for nearly a week and I still can’t believe it happened. I knew she was dying - it was always there, a reminder that I would lose her like everyone else - but I thought she had months, not hours, when I saw her last.

When she had shouted at us to fight while she stayed behind to die.

Defeating Gaara had been a test of both teamwork and persuasion. Shikamaru stayed back to play decoy for the contingent of Oto nin hunting for weak targets; Shino was forced to go up against Kankuro to speed us along leaving Sasuke to deal with Temari as I dealt with Gaara.

Gaara.

He was so full of anger and sorrow and -

If I had never met Nee-chan - if I had never had Sasuke and Iruka-sensei and Kakashi-sensei -

Would I have been like him?

Did I manage to get through to him?

I hope so.

Arriving back at the village was a mixture of pride and aprehnsion - I never thought that Konoha would be _invaded_ -

But we had warning and the casualty rates were low. We were forcing them back -
Then Shikamaru had found us.

Jiraiya had arrived at the hospital before us, an eerie mirror of how they first met, and he managed to cover her in enough seals to effectively shut down her chakra pathways. He froze them, forcing whatever chakra still remained to stagnate; unable to escape and land the killing blow.

So she was alive but unconscious, and she would be until her pathways were repaired and a Yin Seal miraculously applied.

After the pills go down roughly, I sit back examining her seals. They were beautiful, really, but only if you got past the part where they were the only thing keeping her from death.

The ink was pitch, pitch black, but with a sheen that stood out against her tanned skin - like oil. Most of it was covered by her clothes, but we had put her in an open backed shirt as to have easy access to the problem points: where her Yin Seals should’ve been.

The seal itself flared out like wings, spanning across her back in a swirl of lines and kana. The only saving grace in the morbidly beautiful macabre of a life support system was that when I reached out to feel for Orochimaru’s chakra all I could feel was the ice cold stone of Noa’s frozen chakra. No hickey. No snake-pedo. Only Noa.

A secondary seal, one that maintained brain function and her coma, started at the base of her neck and wrapped around to her left cheek, across her nose, and over her right eyebrow. The line was continuous and waved, ending to branch out to surround a single kanji in a simple circle at her temple.

Noa - ‘From love.’

**UCHIHA ITACHI**

I clutched my tea, barely daring to breathe as my brother, my otouto, slumped down exhausted across from the Nara heir.

He looks ... older. And stronger.

Good.

The Nara simply sighed, pushing a cup and plate of dango to his new companion, “You look like you just ran through the Forest of Death. Twice.”

Sasuke huffs out a bitter laugh, devouring the dango viciously. “Try sparring against Lee. The guy’s a damn monster, I swear.”

They sit in silence, sipping their tea, and Kisame glances at me, clearly wondering why we were sticking around just to eavesdrop on some lowly genin.

‘Friends of those who defeated the One-tails. And of the Nine-tails. Hold position.’ I sign with a free hand, tilting my rice hat lower over my eyes.

“You’re worried.” The Nara states, tone void of any emotion, a feat rather impressive for his age.
“Yes,” Sasuke sighs, “Why wouldn’t I be? She’s in a coma -”

“And they’re headed out to find a solution - don’t you know Naruto’s crazy luck? Or her own for that matter?”

“What luck?”

The Nara laughs, a bit dryly. “The luck where Naruto seems to sway anyone and everyone to his side and where Noa always manages to find the oddest people -”

Noa ...

The little girl who Sasuke and the Nine-tails followed around when they were kids?

That kind of connection is dangerous, though it sounds as though she and the Nine-tails have left the village. The One-tails is long gone.

I gracefully stand, Kisame following, and head for the village edge.

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**UZUMAKI NARUTO**

There’s a knocking at the door and Pervy Sage hasn’t come back from hooking up with that girl.

I close my eyes, reaching out with my chakra sense... there are two nin outside my door with -Kage level chakra!

Shit. I can’t defend Noa like this.

I activate some store-bought sound and sensory deafening tags on the floor panels, cursing that I don’t have (or know how to make) anything more powerful. I flick out two shadow clones, one of which wraps up Noa in Jiraiya’s haori while the other hikes through the window.

As they begin to evacuate her, I summon a toad using the barest amount of chakra as to not get a tadpole.

Gamakichi appears, and before he can speak I’m shushing him. “Go get Jiraiya - tell him they’re two S-class shinobi outside the room.”

The knocking grows more insistent, and just as Gamakichi poofs away it gets wrenched open by a tall teenager who could only be an Uchiha.

Uchiha Itachi.

*Fuck*

________________________

**UCHIHA ITACHI**

“Uzumaki Naruto.”

The moment that the words leave my mouth I’m forced to clear way for six Shadow Clones before they bowl me over, the lot of them seemingly aiming to inhibit Kisame.
Shifting my stance, intent on keeping both the swarm of clones and the original within my sights, I examine our target. Naruto - looking just as worn as Sasuke did - is facing me, flanked by two clones, his eyes locked on my torso and hips.

“I see you are versed in the ways to fight a Sharingan,” I state, lightly praising. He almost shifts his gaze up to my face, but stops at the last second, scowling.

“Yeah I am -ttebayo,” He growls in response, grip on his puny blade tightening. “Why are you here, Itachi-nii-san?”

I hold back a flinch at Sasuke’s term of endearment with difficulty, instead continuing to bare my gaze down into the Nine-Tails. He was a brat - now and then - but he was Sasuke’s friend. He and Noa made him happy.

But we can’t have that, not when I need him to be so far down the path of destruction that he can defeat me. The girl is dying, so it seems. I will have to deal with Uzumaki myself.

Samehada cuts through the Shadow Clones decisively, sucking the chakra in with no small amount of greed.

That sword always was ... disturbing, to say the least.

“Oh ho ho,” Kisame chuckles, his gills twitching in amusement. “It seems as though the Kyuubi brat has more spunk than we gave him credit for. Might have to cut off a couple limbs to keep him from squirming ~”

Samehada comes down in a downward swing, and all I can think is ‘Kami Sasuke is going to hate me-.’

“Toad Mouth Bind!”

Kisame’s strike is halted mid-swing as the hall suddenly becomes fleshy and shrinks dramatically, capturing the blade. Naruto wrenches his feet free from the now tacky ground and bounds past me, down the hall to where a well concealed presence has revealed itself -

“Jiraiya of Mt. Myoboku,” I intone, mind working at a million miles per hour. Jiraiya was a point of contact that I had been unable to use as a handler to provide information on the Akatsuki, but not out of unwillingness. He is no ally of Danzo and has close ties to the Sandaime but there was never a time to persuade him to trust my information. I did not want to fight him, I had no order to do so and in fact I had suspicions that Pain wanted to handle him personally.

We needed to retreat. Now.

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JIRAIYA

I reverse the Binding jutsu and laid the genjutsu-ed woman down before turning to help Naruto’s clone lay Noa down comfortably. I sit back on my heels, rubbing the bridge of my nose, attempting futilely to banish the building Gamabunta-sized migraine in my skull.

“You got my toad.”

‘Kami he sounds to weary,’ I can’t help but think.
Aloud, I scoff. “Of course I did? Who do you take me to be?”

“A pervert,” He volleys back promptly, gesturing meaningfully at the woman. “But also kind ‘caught up’ in something.”

I shake my head, a little embarrassed. “Nah, she was under a genjutsu and -”

“You totally fell for it.” He finished for me, a bit of his mischievous energy returning. Really, when he wasn’t worried or exasperated he was more like Kushina than Minato.

It hurt to see him so down.

“Why were they here?” I ask, running a thumb over Noa’s Stasis seal absentmindedly.

He cocks an eyebrow at me appraisingly, “I was about to ask you the same thing. They seemed to be after me for some reason, or more accurately after the Nine-Tails. Plus those coats - a uniform of some sort?”

I shake my head, “I don’t know.”

I didn’t know. And that was bad.

“C’mere kid,” I tug my new student up, “Sitting around won’t help you protect those you care about - training will.”

He sighs and sets his scroll fall to the side - dusting leaves off his slacks and sparing Noa a quick glance. I pull out a water balloon, tossing it to him - throwing the kid off.

“Here, you’ll need this.”

He peers at the toy cautiously, as if waiting for it to explode. Well, only if he could get this down.

I stare dumbstruck as - with ease - Naruto burst the balloon on his first try. I didn’t even need to fully explain it before he went ahead and gave it a go - seemingly to instinctively know what to do after seeing it only once.

“Huh,” He puffs out, examining the scraps of plastic in his hand, pieces smaller than even I can make. “That was kinda like Noa’s gift.”

That catches my attention. “What’s this got to do with Noa-chan? Gift - you mean her Kekkei Genkai?”

The brat simply shakes his head, looking over his shoulder to gaze sadly at his teammate. “No, her gift - a gift she gave me.”

Seeing my confusion, the brat begins to slowly gather chakra in his palm and his wrist, “Noa said that she was reading in the library one day about famous techniques; she wanted to see what she could replicate with her bloodline limit.”

As soon as the last words exit his mouth, he’s finished forming what looks to be a chakram - a foot
wide circular blade for throwing or close combat - made entirely out of sapphire chakra. It was spinning at high speeds, and before my eyes the brat slams his fist into the ground - tearing it up faster and more deadly than any blade.

I fight - and fight hard - to keep any surprise or awe off my face, settling instead to adopt a pondering look. “So Noa-chan developed a jutsu just for you?”

“Yeah,” He aquieces, a hint of pride in his voice, “She said it was a gift for all the birthdays that I couldn’t celebrate before - gave it to me just a couple months ago.”

‘This girl invented a jutsu almost identical to the general rotation concept of the Rasengan - adapting it so it could used by those without her bloodline - and gave it to an orphan because he never got presents before.’

The brat just earned even more of my respect.

I blow up a balloon and toss it to my protege’s son, not even bothering to hide my smile. “Let’s see if you can contain it, then.”

SENJU TSUNADE

Three sevens blink up at me from the slot machine, and a thrill of apprehension runs through me - cold as ice and sharp as shuriken.

“Wow! Three sevens! How rare!” Shizune celebrates behind me, oblivious to my trepidation.

“Let’s get out of here.” I mutter, gathering my winnings (Hey, bad luck or not - I’m still in debt) and getting the hell out of dodge.

But not fast enough.

“It’s been a very long time … Orochimaru.”

I can feel tension radiating off Shizune beside me, and I fight to keep my own heart level.

‘I don’t need any reminders of my damn past - much less you.’

“I’ve been searching for you,” He call out to me, voice sweet as honey and as deadly as venom.

“What do you want from me? You’re not here to talk about the good old days.”

He simply nods to the bandages binding his arms as his lackey begins to spout some flattering nonsense about a person I wasn’t anymore.

I get bored - cutting him off.

“Your arms - that’s not an ordinary wound, is it? How’d you manage that?”

He hisses with genuine anger and frustration and … greed?

“I was careless, was so damn close to killing the Third - but that damn girl-”
"You tried to kill Sensei?" I demand, shocked by how far he went.

His lackey cuts in before anyone else could react, "His chakra system has been fried on a molecular level -"

"Don’t care." I grind out, temper crowing short. "Get out of here - I don’t need anymore ghost to haunt me, much less yours."

"Ah - but I have a deal to cut, Hime."

"Don’t. Call me -" I shove my fist into the wall, shattering what was left of Tanzaku Castle "-HIME!"

The damn traitorous bastard looks unbothered -

"I can bring back those you have lost - with the forbidden jutsu I developed."

My breath catches and the world stops -

---

I draw a long pull, draining the rest of my beer before calling for another, the flush of alcohol rising in my cheeks. Shizune’s worried - I know she is - but I can’t help it.

I can’t take anymore ghosts.

"TSUNADE!"

Yet they *keep coming.*
THE PRICE OF BLOOD - PART TWO

Chapter Summary

“Give her here,” Tsunade demands.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - Thoughts

In Text Bolded - Tailed Beast

UZUMAKI NARUTO

I help Jiraiya gently place Noa down onto the booth seat beside me, maneuvering her so she’s sandwiched between us with her torso against the seat back and her head up against the Toad Sage’s side.

Immediately I know that both of the medic nin (the Slug Princess Tsunade, this is perfect) have their eyes locked onto my nee-chan, and I force myself to stay silent. Every part of me wants to get in the old hag’s face and demand that she do everything in her power -

But no. I heard enough about the woman around the village: you can’t force her to do anything she doesn’t want to, unless there’s a bet involved.

And that’s what I’ll have to do.

The meal continues on with the tension rising. The two Sannin are discussing something - I don’t know what - but I catch the tail end of it:

“- the Village of the Leaf has issued a request for you to be the Godaime Hokage.”

“What?” I can’t help but demand, “She abandoned the village - yes, she’s powerful, but the Old Man can’t be that crazy can he?”

The hag levels her - rather drunk - gaze at me, finally looking somewhere that isn’t the Noa, Jiraiya, or the bottom of her glass. “And who are you?”

“He is Uzumaki Naruto.” Jiraiya says, as if my name would have some further meaning. That confuses me, why would -

“And her?” Tsunade interrupts my thoughts, eyes locked on the sealwork maring my sister’s face.

Jiraiya smiles dryly, “Tsubasa Noa.”

“‘From wings of love,’” Tsunade grumbles into her beer, gaze wandering back to Noa time and time again. “Her parents sure were sappy. Thought the Tsubasa all died out.”
“What parents?” I grumble, “Orphans, the both of us.”

“She’s the last, Hime.” Pervy Sage explains, cutting over me. There’s deceptive lightness in his tone; we both know how much is riding on this first impression. “Bastard child.”

A deafening pause.

“Give her here,” Tsunade demands, and it takes all of my willpower to keep the smile of victory off my face, only showing worry and suspicion that I don’t even have to fake.

“Oh calm down, brat.” Tsunade snaps at me, reaching over and hiking Noa over the table by Jiraiya’s spare haori herself. “I’m not going to hurt her.”

Tsunade shoves Noa into the other woman’s - Shizune’s - arms as medical ninjutsu lights up light green across the hag’s palm, lazily running her hand over Nee-chan’s forehead as if checking for a fever.

“Well? Will you take up the mantle?” Jiraiya prods, and I want to punch him.

Under the table he signs to me in the standard Konoha signs, ‘Distracting her will make her more curious.’

Fine. Curious is good. But I still don’t get why she should be Hokage.

SENJU TSUNADE

This girl should not be alive.

It’s it’s own kind of impossible that her heart still beats to be honest. I would’ve expected her to have kicked it long ago, weeks at least.

Yet here she is.

With Jiraiya and another brat.

And that brat - Kushina’s kid or no - needs to shut his damn mouth. He’s overstepping too far -

So I did the mature thing and took it outside, Jiraiya carrying the little feather of a girl and Shizune with Tonton, to settle it in the shinobi fashion.

The kid was good, but it was still pitifully easy to beat him, though that Rasengan was unexpected, uncompleted or not.

“Jiraiya! Was it you who tried to teach this brat the Rasengan?”

The kid stiffens, but Jiraiya merely shifts his precious, although light (that girl was skin and bones), burden and shrugs.

I can’t keep the bitter laugh in, “Teaching him an impossible jutsu - only you and the Yondaime could do the Rasengan.”
“Shut up!” The kid snaps, sounding furious. “There is no such thing as impossible! They said it was impossible for me to make genin - and I did! They said it was impossible to beat Neji - but I still did! ‘Impossible’ is just an excuse to give up!”

I can only scoff at his arrogance and ignorance, “You don’t know the first thing about possibility, kid.”

“Even if what you say is true to you, it’s a lie to me!” He shouts back, shaking in fury. “It’s a good thing you don’t seem to want to take the damn hat because that’s my ‘impossible’ dream. You’d just disgrace it!”

‘ No. Not another innocent to die chasing that foolish dream. Kami please, no.’

“Tell you what, brat.” I tease, keeping the tension and frustration out of my voice. “The seat is a damn curse, but I’ll trade one for another.”

I reach up and touch my necklace, “If you can completely learn that impossible jutsu in a week then I’ll take the damn seat and give you this necklace until you can take the hat yourself.”

The kid narrows his eyes at the necklace, not really believing the curse but taking in Shizune’s scandalized reaction with calculating eyes. “And if I lose?”

“I don’t take the hat, you leave me alone - for good. And -” My grin was feral, “- Little Feather doesn’t get my Yin Seal.”

The look of dumbfounded shock that crosses the brat’s face is so painfully like Nawaki - my sweet little brother - I feel the air ripped out of me.

“You have a Yin Seal?”

I smirk, ‘Hook, line, and sinker.’

I tap my Strength of a Hundred Seal, “What do you think this is, brat? Yin Seals are a closely guarded secret - one that I am the only one alive privy to.”

And just as quickly that shock is replaced with determination and steel.

“Deal.”

I turn the Little Feather over, exposing her scars and the seals painted across her back. It’s good work - no doubt Jiraiya’s - and luckily made to be modified. I have Uzumaki running through my veins ; sealing is in my blood. I can play around with this girl’s ink.

I work for nearly an hour before Shizune returns - no doubt from trying to talk some sense into the brat. I know my apprentice well.

“I thought that you were betting the girls life,” Shizune comments., disgust in her tone. Oh, right. Shizune wasn’t actually psychic, she just acted like it.

“As if I would do such a thing,” I grit, teeth clenched in concentration. “The brat isn’t going to win but there’s no reason that I shouldn’t be able to solve this little riddle because her friend is incompetent and arrogant.”

“Sister. He called her sister.”
… Nawaki …

“Onee-chan - you are the best onee-chan ever!”

… Damn that kid …

“... And anyway, I said she wouldn’t get my Yin Seal - I’ve always wondered if I could make a variation. I’m doing this for me - for fun.”

Shizune smiles, and Tonton waddles over to snuggle up against my new charge. “Of course, Tsunade-hime. Of course.”

TSUBASA NOA

I feel like ... I’m ... floating.

It’s dreamlike, really, there’s just … endlessness. The world around me is weightless, and inky black. There’s no light, no harshness ... only empty.

I don’t know how long I’ve been there ... floating. I don’t think I care. I can’t think … my lives and memories forgotten. It’s just … being. Existing ... but only barely.

I don’t care, I decide.

If this is death, I can live with this.

Heh. ‘Live.’

Even if I am alone. I was alone before Konoha - I’ve lived that life.

Better alone knowing everyone else was alive than together knowing everyone you love is dead.

The light is a change.
It came in little amounts - green and strong, the new leaves of an old pine. Sharp when provoked, but warm and silky to the gentle touch.

I don’t know how long the new was there - maybe not as long the dark was - but as immeasurable time passes, it all gets brighter and brighter … warmer.

Then the light flares until it burns -

My body's on fire - no, not my body. Something deeper -

Adrenaline shoots through my body and something shatters - and suddenly I’m awake -

After so long in the dark, suddenly being surrounded by light and sound is - overwhelming. I process things in the sort of detached way that one remembers a dream - piecemeal thoughts, useless information that doesn’t make sense.

Kabuto is there - I take a nearby kunai and stab him in the shoulder before channeling all the chakra I suddenly had into a debilitating kick.

Ruto’s on the ground - I rush over and use Mystic Palm to stop the bleeding on his shoulder.

Jiraiya’s fighting Orochimaru - I drag Ruto out of the line of fire.

Ruto’s awake - I hand him my kunai.

There’s a woman with dark hair - she’s saying something, I don’t know what. I think there’s something wrong with her legs - I go to help.

Orochimaru launches himself at Ruto, a sword in his mouth. A woman stops him - I go to rush over only for Jiraiya to stop me, his hand on my shoulders, holding me down.
He’s saying something too - my ears are ringing.

He leaves, and suddenly there are giant summons, a smaller slug brings Ruto over to me and the woman - I check him over.

I should probably be in awe of a fight on this large scale - I feel detached.

Manda dispels himself. Orochimaru and Kabuto look like they’re about to get away -

Chakra flows through me in a way that just feels so right and I take off at a run, my loose clothes whipping in the wind as I follow my instincts and build -

A laugh escapes as I take flight, rising with a feeling of such freedom and Orochimaru locks eyes with me - greed in his visage.

I need to hit him -

I launch a volley of chakra feathers sharpened by my fine control - straight as any arrow - right at the traitor scum -

But they disappear into the ground.

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**JIRAIYA**

Orochimaru disappears, taking his little spy with him, and I finally have enough time to breathe and collect myself and -

Holy shit no wonder Kakashi said Noa looked like an avenging angel.

“Bunta, get me closer to her.” I order the Chief, relieved that she was able to use her chakra in this way - I owed the Hime big time.

We pull even with her and with her back to us I can see two sapphire strokes beginning at the base of her skull, gracefully following the curve of her spine to flourish out and around her shoulder.
blades.

Her Yin Seal.

At our arrival she shifts towards us, and even with her above us - meters above - I can see the shattered remains of the Stasis Seal. Tsunade was low on time when she pushed to wake her up - needing another line of defense as quickly as possible - and she must’ve needed to break through it with brute force.

I trusted her, she would never cause any damage she couldn’t fix, but I was still worried; Noa didn’t seem all there when I tried to tell her to stay with Shizune - she didn’t even seem to hear me.

Noa eyes are locked on where Orochimaru had left, looking lost and frustrated.

“Noa-chan,” I call out to her, flaring my chakra brightly to gain her attention. She looks over, eyes clouded with confusion. “Why don’t you come over here, okay?”

She blinks, confused still and giving no sign of coming down anytime soon. Her attention wanders again and -

“Noa-chan,” I repeat, drawing her eyes back to me. “Do you want to see your Ruto?”

That seems to get through to her, and with a twitch of her feathers she’s landing on Gamabunta’s head. I marvel at how much pure instinct she’s going off of - she’s never flown before, yet now she’s doing it as easy as breathing.

Yeah, we owe Tsunade-hime big time.

I approach her carefully, mindful of how thrown off she must be feeling. “Noa-chan, it’s Jiraiya. If you want to see Ruto I’m going to need to pick you up so I need you put your wings away, okay?”

Her wings begin to fade and I gently scoop her up into my arms, ‘Time to see your Ruto, Noa-chan.’

Chapter End Notes

Well ya'll, it seems as though quite a few of you are looking for a Noa - Shikamaru pairing! I was actually headed that way, but didn't want to explicitly say so, as I wanted for you all to have an unbiased say.

Just to be completely clear - THIS IS NOT A LEMON FIC. NO. I WILL NOT. SORRY NOT SORRY.

Suggestions are welcome in the comments!

Thank you all so much for reading and sticking with me for this long!
- Milo Of the Key
Chapter Summary

Dying.

Or not, apparently.

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TSUBASA NOA

“Uuuuugh - my head … what - did Bull sit on me or something? God - ”

“Heh, no way Sis - you just nearly died is all-”

My eyes snap open and I bolt upright - face to face with Ruto.

It takes me a second to process where we are - an inn with three beds, but only Ruto and I there.

My head throbs dully, but I feel the best I have in months -

I have chakra circulating through me - a lot of it. More than I’ve ever had.

How in the - ?

- It all comes rushing back to me - using my wings, the Sannin fight, the darkness …

Dying.

Or not, apparently.

“In case you’re wondering,” Ruto laughs out with an extra biting edge, pulling me tight into his arms in a monster sized hug. “I’m not going to get mad at you for doing something as moronic as poisoning our teacher just to go die - I’m going to let Gai, Kakashi, Sasuke, and SHIKAMARU do that for me!”

I groan at the thought of facing that shitstorm. “Can’t I just go back to being dead? That sounds easier.”
Ruto laughs again, a little strained. “**Hell. no.**”

He hauled himself off the bed, dragging me with him. “**C’mon, get changed. I’ll introduce you to our new Hokage!**”

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**SENJU TSUNADE**

Both the brats are awake and underfoot and as happy as I am about it, part of me wishes that Jiraiya would’ve just stuck them both in Stasis Seals for the sake of my sanity.

Little Feather looks better up and about. Naruto’s yellow hair and Noa’s curly locks stand out in the crowds of the Tanzaku Quarters and I can’t help the smile on my face when Naruto drags his sister up to us in excitement.

“Hey, Baa-chan!” He calls, and I twitch at the nickname. “I wanted Nee-chan to meet you! For real this time!”

The brat then proceeds to turn to the Little Feather and rocket off some long introduction in a language I had never heard before. I’m immediately lost, but the girl follows along just fine - treating me to a warm, grateful smile and a polite nod. I decide to deliberately ignore the part of me that wants to squeal at how cute she was -

“I wanted Nee-chan to meet you! For real this time!”

The brat then proceeds to turn to the Little Feather and rocket off some long introduction in a language I had never heard before. I’m immediately lost, but the girl follows along just fine - treating me to a warm, grateful smile and a polite nod. I decide to deliberately ignore the part of me that wants to squeal at how cute she was -

“Lady Tsunade, thank you for healing me. I thought that I would never find a Yin Seal. I suppose I owe you my life.”

I wave her thanks away, mostly just glad that she and Naruto were both healthy. “Don’t worry about it - making a variant of the Strength of a Thousand Seal was fun, however ...”

I lean down to her eye level, examining the little fledgeling of a girl, “I hear that you healed Naruto up during the fight, Little Feather. Shizune’s leg too.”

Noa gives a little start, eyes widening both at my now close proximity and the fact that she had little better than first aid training and I was the top of my field. She blushes, foot scraping at the ground, before answering, “Yes, I did. I completed some basic medical training for my genin team - I wanted to be a medic, but had to stop because of my whole ‘dying’ thing.”

I stand back up, nodding to myself thoughtfully. “You’re chakra control is almost perfect, possibly even at Shizune’s level despite your lack of intensive training...”

I glance over at my first apprentice, and by her smile I can tell she likes where I’m going with this.

“Guess I can’t just leave you like that - too much potential. I’ll take you on for training, Little Feather.”

Seeing Noa’s jaw drop was well worth the pain in the ass that her goddamn Seal was -

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**NARA SHIKAMARU**

“C’mon! We need to go at this another round - we have the energy to!” I growl at Asuma, feeling frustrated that the one time I feel motivated to train my team feels like taking a break.
“Shikamaru. We have been training nonstop since the sun came up - Ino and Choji are dead on their feet. And so are you.” Asuma volleys back, his tone infuriatingly calm. “You won’t help Noa by driving yourself into the ground.”

“I won’t help her by sitting back and doing nothing either!”

“Shika -” Choji starts, but a startled yelp from Ino cuts him off - she’s pointing over my shoulder ...

“Shika! Is that - !”

I whip around, feet sliding across the packed earth of the training ground and -

And Noa is there and alive and upright and -

Before I can stop myself I’ve run to her and pulled her into my arms, cherishing the feeling of her arms around my waist.

I’m taller than her now. I hadn’t realized.

“Troublesome woman,” Is all that I can choke out, voice thick.

Troublesome, troublesome woman.

‘It’s a good thing I love you.’

I drag Noa through the Nara forest, the both of us shushining from branch to branch - marveling at her once again easy use of chakra.

‘This is how it should be.’

We finally settled down on the crest of my favorite hill in my favorite clearing - our favorite clearing - and the both of us leaned back to gaze up at the clouds. I feel at rest for the first time in months, the girl I thought I lost forever curled up into my side.

I want to be angry at her - I am angry at her - but she’s alive for now and she’s content to come to me first. To put my company above Sasuke and Kakashi and Gai and -

I can’t get mad at her for that. Not now.

HATAKE KAKASHI

Spotting Naruto enjoying a meal at Ichiraku’s made my heart stop. Fear grips my heart so firmly I have to gasp, horror setting in.

But I force myself to think -

Naruto eats ramen when he’s upset, but there’s no way to know how he would react to the death of one of his teammates. Jiraiya’s not there - but the man could be giving my cute little genin space to work things out, or because he doesn’t need to be comforted. Naruto didn’t come to see me first so either he didn’t want to see me or he couldn’t so -
I can’t tell. I don’t know. How do I know if my imouto has lived?

I can’t. I don’t.

Oh kami please -

“Oh!” Naruto cries as he spots me, my heart lightening at the easy cheer in his tone. “Kakashi-sensei!”

I stroll over, deliberately keeping my posture loose and my steps even.

Do not rush over to him. Do not. Even steps. Even gate. C’mon.

“Oh!” I greet, mild as milk. “Was there something you forgot to tell me?”

He blinks once, and Kami sometimes I forget that when no one he cares about is at risk Naruto’s as scatterbrained as Minato-sensei (and as easily distracted as Kushina-nee-chan).

It finally clicks, a look of guilt and surprise crossing his features, “Oh! Nee-chan! I thought she came to find you - she wanted to talk to you herself!”

‘She came to find you - she wanted to talk to you herself.’

She’s up. She’s about. She’s alive -

“Where is she now?” I can’t help but demand, shoulders tense.

“Dunno. Shika’s?”

The Shushin I enacted to find Gai and my imouto is faster than ever before.

When Gai and I find them - find her - they’re sleeping, an obviously abandoned game of shogi on the grass beside them.

Gai and I stand there for a long time, just soaking in the feeling of peace radiating off the two genin and the thrum of Noa’s chakra singing through her veins.

Gai squats down to examine the shogi board, and with an utterly silent smile of pure Youth he holds up a golden general, applying enough pressure for the henge to silently ‘puff’ -

‘She’s using her tricks again, it seems.’

The knot of my chest and the weight of my heart abruptly vanishes and I feel like the world is back on its axis. I let out a satisfied sigh, sharing a relieved look with Gai.

And with my fears settled, I change gears - fast.

I turn to where my little sister is sleeping with a man -

This had better not be the little Nara attempting to court sweet, innocent little Noa-chan -
Gai and I had, using sign language, decided to let the genin relax for as long as they wished (and for the pitiful excuse for a Nara live), so I cast a light genjutsu so that neither young shinobi would be disturbed until they woke on their own.

For everything that Noa has done - for this village, for Gai, for me - I owe her this much: the chance to bask in the sun in the company of a friend. No psychopathic murderers or pedophiles or bloodlines or villagers.

Just clouds and sun and grass and Konoha and each other.

Sasuke eventually finds us - evidently put out that Naruto was the one who had to tell him, but his annoyance is quickly overwhelmed by the sheer relief that he wouldn’t lose his sister like everyone else he had ever considered family.

(He was also quite understanding when I told him that I’d kept her resting for a bit longer. That Shikamaru was caught in the crossfire was sure happenstance.)

(Though the calculating look of a repressed matchmaker at work in the Last Loyal Uchiha’s gaze was enough to deter any suggestions to lift the illusion.)

I don’t quite know when or how the crowd gathered - only that it did.

Sasuke stuck around, so it was inevitable that Naruto would come looking after him like a cute little puppy.

Gai staying - and trying to last as long as physically possible in a plank using only his elbows - eventually drew Lee to us like a moth to Youthful flames, dragging Neji and Tenten along for the ride.

And just like that, our numbers doubled.

And so it grew. Choji and Ino came looking after Shikamaru, and Asuma followed soon after. Asuma brought along Kurenai who brought along her team and Anko - who managed to drag Genma and Raido along for the ride.

And so they kept coming.

Eventually Shikaku was sent out to gather his son for dinner and then somehow the Nara, Akimichi, and Yamanaka clan heads and their wives were suddenly there too in the clearing.

Then runs were made. With the sun touching the horizon, the Akimichi would brought food as sake was poured, along with juice and tea. Naruto made a ramen run and managed to cajoil Iruka into hauling it back with him. Anko dragged Ibiki into a dango raid and Lee and Gai suddenly - and inexplicably - just had curry.

Jackets were spread on the ground, shogi sets produced. Targets were pulled up on trees and dango carried loosely in hand. It was the stirrings of … something.

Something great.
The kind of something that turned the gaping chidori-sized hole in my chest into … something … Something.

TSUBASA NOA

Waking up was slow - but not the injured, drugged, dying kind of slow. The kind of slow where I take more time appreciating the feel of grass tickling my arms then bother about when Gai was going to pounce on me to get me out of bed. The kind of slow where the sun is at just the right angles to strike my eyelids, lighting my newfound vision in a glowing orange without blinding me with glare.

The kind of slow where I can appreciate the feel of my head on someone’s stomach and their fingers entwined in my hair.

I think I could stay like this forever.

But of course, good things come to an end and there's a twinge at my senses. It takes me a second to remind myself that I’m allowed to use my chakra again, so eyes still closed I look inward -

I’m under a genjutsu?

It’s light - and gradually wearing off - but it’s still there.

I flare my chakra slightly with a tinge of panic, and just as the technique wears off there’s a moment of noise - until silence.

I push myself up and meet Shika’s equally confused gaze before turning to look around us.

There are people everywhere -

I jump up, a blush dusting my cheeks, and sound returns to Stag’s once calm clearing - greetings and cheers and warmth and -

It’s so overwhelming I feel myself take a step back, not quite sure how to take it all in, and end up backing into something warm and solid. I turn around, breath held in so much hope -

“Nii-san,” I whisper, my voice a whisper on the wind.

But for once he isn’t boisterous. He isn’t youthful. He isn’t loud.

He’s just there and he holds me -

And I decide that maybe a good thing didn’t come to an end, something better just started.

I mingle. This chaotic gathering that somehow revolved around me in some disastrous, unplanned way gave me no choice - although I wasn’t complaining. Why would I?

I’m surrounded by those I love.
It felt good to say that. My second life had more horror than my first …

But it made the good parts that much better.

Gradually I had talked to everyone there even as the number grew. The older generation of Ino-Shika-Cho and their wives teased Shikamaru mercilessly, and I replied cheekily that I already had an offer from Kiri to kick off the Tsubasa Clan over there - and wasn’t that just a shame.

(I had to drag Shika away from that. He was immobilized and torn by his sudden need to laugh at his parent’s and aunts’ and uncles’ expressions - which ranged from disgust, horror, and undying rage - and reacting the same way himself. I eventually just dropped him off with Choji and Ino to calm down.)

The Team 7 reunion was … I didn’t even have the superlatives. It was exactly as it should have been and more. Sasuke was stubborn and loving and dumb and amazing and I loved him so much I couldn’t ask for a better mother hen of a brother. Ruto was ecstatic to have the lot of us back together, and I was forced to tune him out as he went on about his new ideas for team training and joint missions.

And Kakashi.

Kakashi was angry - furious, but knowing him I can’t hold it against him - but his hug was as warm as Gai’s and as awkward as Shika’s. I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way.

I broke his heart. And I know that. Somehow just thinking ‘I had to’ isn’t enough to justify what I put him through. I can’t ever do that to him again - not ever. I guess I didn’t realize how much he loved me until he thought I was gone.

I don’t think he did either.

Gai and Lee perked up after I casually flicked my shogi set away (God it felt so good to just do that) and their Youth returned full force. Thanks to Tsunade kindly clearing me for duty, I was fully capable of going up against Lee in a ‘who-can-climb-to-the-top-of-that-tree-without-using-chakra-or-their-feet’ competition - which I won.

Speaking of Tsunade, the Godaime Hokage herself popped by to formally request me as an apprentice. Kakashi was shocked and proud and unsurprised all rolled up in one, and Gai was literally crying rivers. Like, there was a downhill point of erosion by the time Kakashi managed to calm him down.

I have no idea how he didn’t dehydrate from all of that.

Ruto and Sasuke were proud, and Sasuke especially seemed to like that with Ruto training under Jiraiya more - the moron finally asked to get some fuuinjutsu training - and I under Tsunade he had Kakashi all to himself outside team training.

ANBU was Sasuke’s dream, after all.

Just as being a medic was mine.

And being Hokage was Ruto’s.

Maybe - just maybe - it was going to work out? I know that the war was coming - I know that the Akatsuki was going to kill and harm and Orochimaru was coming after me again - and Sasuke too - and Itachi was still out there and there was Kabuto and Karin and Danzo and Pain and Konan and -
Maybe - just maybe -

We could be ready?
The ANBU on my porch was really not expected.

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Underlined - English

'Italics' - Thoughts

In Text Bolded - Tailed Beast

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TSUBASA NOA

“ Noa! Would you just get your butt down here already? Honestly - a summon by Granny is not that big of a deal! ”

I growl as I fail in my very valid and valiant attempt to tame the untamable mess that was my hair. It was mutiny. A coup. A revolution. A revolt. There was no other explanation.

Sasuke pushed open the rice door to my bedroom, looking Uchiha-trademarked unamused-but-actually-very-amused at the sheer number of broken hair ties on the ground. “ You realize that you could just tuck it all behind your hitai-ate, right?” He comments coyly, smirking as I chuck a desecrated comb at him in pure frustration.

“ WHY didn’t I think of that …?”I grumble as I stumble down the stairs, hair finally - yet still poorly - tamed behind my bandana-styled hitai-ate. I stick an apple between my teeth and forcefully drag the rest of my team out of my (and Ruto’s) kitchen, shooting a glare at Shika to keep up.

But of course, Ruto isn’t happy with being late even as we begin to Shushin at high speeds to the Tower, “ What?! You were doing your hair -! ”

Sasuke cuts him off with a pointed cough. “ For Shi-” Sasuke started, eyeing the Nara with a catlike amusement.

“ Shut it!” I holler just as I vault into the Hokage Tower, whisking to face the boys who plague my life properly. “ You are all children! ”

“ Well…” Shika follows in after me, leaning against the window ledge - putting in his two cents, “ Technically - yes. But also no - being ninja and all. ”

Oh if looks could kill. They would all be extinct.

“ Not. Helping. Stag. ”

Through Ruto’s rather uproarious laughing, a pointed cough behind me reminds us of exactly
where we were. I turn to see a mildly inebriated and half-irritated, half-confused Hokage. I suppress a blush and - recovering quickly - I bow low and overly respectfully in an attempt to play it off.

Oh who am I kidding? Points for trying, at least.

Tsunade shoots me a ‘We are discussing this later’ look, but kindly ignores our rather awkward entrance despite that. The four of us line up in front of the Hokage’s ginormous desk and stand to semi-formal attention, determined to the last of us to show at least a semblance of maturity despite our setbacks.

Dunno if it worked -

“Uchiha Sasuke, Nara Shikamaru, Uzumaki Naruto, and Tsubasa Noa.” Tsunade intones, scraping up a bit of formality herself. “I have summoned all of you today for my first formal act as Hokage - the results of the Chunin Exams.”

Immediately I feel myself tense, my shoulders stiffening and my Seal tingling like I noticed it does when my chakra is in turmoil.

We were getting promoted?

“I was not here for the Exams,” The Godaime pushes through, ignoring the tension filling the room. “And the Exams were not completed in a traditional sense. However, I have conferred with various sources and seen a few of you in action. Therefore, instead of simply signing a form I feel the need to clarify why I feel each of you should be promoted.”

‘Each of you should be promoted.’

‘FUCK YEAH!’ I cheer internally, forcing myself to focus back on my new mentor’s words.

“Uchiha Sasuke.” She begins, briefly consulting the sheet of notes in her hands. “You were recommended a field promotion by Hatake Kakashi and Nara Shikaku - separately, interestingly enough. Kakashi recommended you for your growth since your Genin Exam and your skill and attitude on the field. Shikaku praises your skill as well, but comments more on the field tactics that you have shown to be able to utilize along with your teamwork. You are hereby promoted to a Chunin of Konohagakure no Sato.”

Sasuke looks over the moon, and Ruto looks like he’s about to comment before Tsunade cuts him off with -

“Nara Shikamaru. You showed forethought and initiative through all of the stages of the exam and improvement from the second stage to the third. You have proven your ability to adapt, plan ahead, and care for your teammates. You are hereby promoted to a Chunin of Konohagakure no Sato.”

Stag bows briefly, and the Last Senju plows on through. “Uzumaki Naruto.”

She begins with a small yet genuine smile. “For your actions opposing both a Jinchuuriki and the rogue Sannin Orochimaru paired with your ability to pick up and process information faster than previously realized, you have been recommended for a field promotion by myself - along with Jiraiya and Kakashi. You’re a Chunin now, brat.”

I can’t help but smile at the obvious dissimilarities between Shika and Sasuke’s promotions and Ruto’s - but hey, it fits them. And Shishou.
“And finally,” Tsunade-shishou turns towards me, another genuine smile on her face. “Tsubasa Noa. For your overpowering of a rogue Sannin, your development of highly ranked jutsu, control over your bloodline limit, identification of a traitor, success and skill throughout the entirety of the Chunin Exams despite your handicaps, and success in saving the Sandaime’s life you are hereby promoted to Chunin of Konohagakure no Sato. Congratulations.”

Well shit when you put it that way ...

“Hey, Ruto.” I call, grabbing my annoying little brother as he just began to admire his new flak jacket. “Gotta talk to you. See you guys!”

I drag Ruto through town - a pure and unrefined bundle of nerves - while snagging some dango as we pass the shop. We end up on top of the monument, legs dangling over the Yondaime’s voluminous spikes. I hand Ruto a stick and wait for him to get settled.

We sit there for a bit, me trying to work out just how to say what I wanted to and him giving me time.

“I know about the Fox.”

Kami pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease please -

He swallows thickly, and I keep my eyes firmly on the horizon - seeing if I can spot a squirrel or see who’s on guard duty. Anything to keep from seeing Ruto’s face. “Do you hate me?” He asks, voice strained.

At this I have to look him dead in the face - for him to understand -

“NO!” I shout, pouring all the conviction into my words as I could. “I could never hate you! Never!”

Then I remember that he’s going to hate me by the end of this conversation and go back to counting trees. Or leaves - leaves sound better.

“Then why are you mad?”

“I’m not mad!” I insist, guilt lacing my voice. “It’s just - I know a lot of things. About you. And I never told you and almost dying made me realize that I should’ve but never did and now I don’t want you to hate me for knowing or not telling you or -”

“What do you know?” He cuts me off, strangely calm. I still can’t look at his face. “What do you know about me?”

I swallow, preparing. “Namikaze Uzumaki Naruto was born on October 10 - the same day as the Nine-Tail attack - to Uzumaki Kushina, Princess of Whirlpool, and Namikaze Minato, the Fourth Fire Shadow and famed Yellow Flash of Konoha. The Uzumaki were well renowned for their sealing ability - and so was the Fourth- and it was traditional for Jinchuuriki to come from the Uzumaki line because of their potent chakra and longevity.”

I cut myself off again, and can feel Ruto stiff against my side. I can’t leave it at that I can’t -

got the same eyes and hair and it’s all spiky and no one else in Konoha has that. But you’re an Uzumaki - not a Namikaze - and they wouldn’t just tack a random clan name onto an orphan that they were trying to hide the identity of. They would take a mother’s name or leave you with only one name like Tenten has - even though she’s not an orphan I mean - and I looked into the Uzumaki and they’re from the Hidden Whirlpool Village and the only one recorded to have come to Konoha after the destruction of Uzushiogakure was their Princess Kushina-hime. And she died the same day as the Yondaime and the Kyuubi attack and they’re right next to each other on the memorial stone - like a couple. And I learned more about sealing and Uzumaki so I could surprise you, right? And this was all a couple years ago and I wanted to give you a gift but then I read about Jinchuuriki and how you can’t actually kill a bijuu and -”

I struggle for air. I can’t breathe. I can’t end it there.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry - I should have told you and -”

Then his arms are around me and we’re both crying.

“Thank you.”

That’s all he says. Until the sun goes down and Sasuke hunts Ruto down for a spar and Shika drags me to his place for dinner.

And we live on.

“Have you ever ... talked to him?”

Ruto looks at me askance, the remnants of our breakfast still being scraped from our plates and bowels. “Talked to who?”

I feel my eyebrows scrunch, trying to figure out how to articulate ‘Omigod just talk already would you? He’s a kinda nice-grumpy guy if you get to know him. And his name’s Kurama, by the way. He’s super powerful and your future best friend.’

Yeah, no easy way to put it.

“The Fox.” I murmur, and he freezes - sponge in hand - and I immediately backtrack. “Okay! Hear me out, okay?”

“Okay ...” He agrees warily.

Good. That’s a start.

“He’s your prisoner, ya know?” I restart, leaning back against the counter - toying with the dishcloth in my hands. “And that’s not his fault. I mean - yeah he attacked village, but why? Did we attack him first? Does he have a family? What’s his name? Is he even a he? He doesn’t want to be trapped in you any more than you want him there, right?”

I leave Ruto looking thoughtful, finishing up the dishes on my own. “Just think on it, yeah?”
The ANBU on my porch was really not expected.

I examine the stoic, androgynous figure in my doorway. Their reptilian mask gives nothing away, and I don’t recognize their chakra signature - though that isn’t saying much since the Sandaime got rid of Ruto and my watch after we hit seven (and successfully managed to avoid all of them for half a week).

“May I help you?” I ask, mentally running through all the appointments that I had and possibly could have missed. I came up short.

“Tsubasa-san,” The elite shinobi greeted neutrally. “You have been requested to meet with Sandaime-sama - if you are willing.”

‘フィリリアシナニッタルベルンヨウ－’

“You wanted to see me?” I ask as I finish Sushin-ing straight into the Sarutobi compound and in front of the waiting - and newly retired - Hokage. I’d never been on Sarutobi land before, it’s a nice place though. The koi pond is lovely.

The Sandaime was dressed casually for the first time I can remember, wearing a casual haori and loose pants, and sat in front of a traditional tea set on his porch. Casual or not, I had no doubt that he was heavily armed - but then again so was I.

His expression was irritatingly hard to read and I didn’t have enough gauge on his personality to really understand the tension in his shoulders or the way that his left arm kept aborting some sort of movement to his face.

He didn’t speak at first, only gesturing benignly for me to sit down across from him and have some tea.

Gyokuro. Nice. He was pulling out all the stops, apparently.

He poured us each a cup, but I make a prudent decision to absolutely not take anything from the high ranking ninja I had pissed off only a few weeks prior.

Hiruzen takes a deep pull from his tea, seemingly disregarding the scalding temperature, and places the cup down with a strangely decisive ‘clack.’

“Tsubasa-san, I would like to apologize to you.”

I’m taken aback - seriously taken aback - and can’t help but lean back and narrow my eyes warily, “Yeeeeeeeeeaaaah … wasn’t expecting that from you.”

He cracks his first genuine expression, a small smile that I used to see whenever Ruto was unintentionally cute.

He better not be calling me cute.

“I can hardly guess why, after all I was the one in the wrong and you did save my life - for which I thank you.” He asserts with genuine thanks (I think). Somewhere along the way I forgot that I was the reason that the old Monkey was still alive. Damn.

But he was still a senile old ape.
“Well,” I manage to get out. “You do realize that you sent an ANBU to my house requesting me to ‘meet’ with you - *after* I yelled at you for being a senile old coot who should’ve retired a decade ago?”

He flinches, and I almost feel bad for telling him off - *almost* - but he was a (over)grown fucking man and he could damn well take it like one.

Then again I just got my life back, and I kinda like living. Maybe I should hold off on the whole ‘Pissing off those who can kill you’ thing.

(Plus Shika and Sasuke would resurrect me just to tell me off for pissing off the God of Shinobi and then just kill me off again.)

“Sorry,” I mutter into my cup, finally caving to the delicious smell. “I stand by what I said that day, but I also claim temporary insanity - I was dying after all. I was out of line.”

He acknowledges this with a gracious tilt of his head, and seems unable to continue on - despite having something more to say.

I hate old people. They always take so long to make their points.

“Good to know that I’m not to be given an execution,” I tease him, secretly actually relieved. “But were you hoping to address anything else? I’m free and all, but Ruto tends to have a sixth sense about when is the worst time to interrupt important conversations.”

“Yes, he does, doesn’t he?” The Sandaime smiles with good humor. “But yes, there is something else I would like you to do for me.”

I gesture for him to continue, but he takes a second draw from his tea before he gets the words out.

“I would like you officially restart the Tsubasa Clan in Konohagakure no Sato.”

I choke on my tea.

“I’m sorry, what?” I choke out, unconsciously reverting to English in my shock.

“I would like you to become a Clan Head and take your proper seat on the council.”

I gesture for him to continue, but he takes a second draw from his tea before he gets the words out.

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“I’m sorry, what?” I choke out, unconsciously reverting to English in my shock.

“I would like you to become a Clan Head and take your proper seat on the council.”

He rephrases, his eyes carefully trained on every aspect of my reactions.

The council. He wants me to be on the council - *me*, the inexperienced, non-political, bastard child of a Tsubasa as a Clan Head? Official reasonings … to train me to take up my positioning at a young age, probably. To incite other existing Tsubasa to come to Konoha, possibly. To honor me for my bravery and defense of Konoha, even?

But unofficial?

Danzo. He wants another person on the council who has a head on their shoulders who won’t be swayed by Danzo. And he wants me, because I have good connections to the right people and have already demonstrated the kind of mentality that he wants most of Konoha to have.

I am not giving into this kind of machinations easily, though - regardless of the reasoning. I better get something good out of this for putting up with damn council meetings.

“You want more numbers so bad,” I comment coyly. “Why don’t you ask the entirety of Team 7? After all, the Last Hatake, Last Loyal Uchiha, and Uzumaki Prince are far more important than
some bastard from an old Kumo clan with no real reputation in Konoha."

I take one look at the Sandaime’s expression and cannot stop myself from facepalming.

“Please tell me me saying that just now was not the first time you even considered that.” I groan, feeling a migraine building up behind my eyes. “Please - ”

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**INUZUKA TSUME**

“Are you joking?” I can’t help but laugh as the retired Sandaime finished introducing the three newly-promoted chunin he wanted to take their ‘rightful place’ as clan heads. “They’re my son’s age - they cannot become clan heads.”

The Uzumaki brat bristles, but the Last Uchiha stays calm however, and the Tsubasa Bastard child just looks bored.

“I see no reason for that to be relevant, Inuzuka-sama.” The whirly-eyed brat sassed me back. “As per the laws dictated by our distinguished clans, the Clan Headship may be claimed by the next in line who is considered an adult in the eyes of the law. Not only are all three of us considered adults, we are chunin and therefore are more ‘adult’ than your genin son.”

Ooooooh. The little brats got some bite. I like that.

“Regardless,” The foreign girl cuts in, sounding as bored as she looked. “It matters not what you have to say in regards to the position of both Uzumaki-sama and Uchiha-sama. The Uchiha were one of the founding clans and Uchiha-sama was the previous Clan Head’s son. The previous Uzumaki Clan Head and Princess fled to Konoha after Uzhiogakure’s downfall and established headship in the village, therefore her son and the last Uzumaki Prince would be fully qualified to gain headship.”

The old coots didn’t look too pleased with that assessment, I note absentmindedly.

“And you?” Shibi prys neutrally, breaking through the tense atmosphere. “You were not part of your own assessment.”

The pup merely shrugs like a jungle cat and shifts her stance. “I acknowledge that as both one of foreign descent and Kumo origin clan-wise that the Council would have difficulties accepting me or my Clan as part of this gathering. However, I see ways for Konoha to benefit - the least of which being that Hyuuga-sama may rub in Kumo’s face that they managed to get a hand on one of their bloodlines.”

I - along with everyone else in the Council - turn to gauge Hiashi’s reaction: stoic. But I’d worked with Hiashi - was on his damn genin team - and I know how much it broke the guy’s icy heart that Kumo almost got away with his daughter and his brother had to suffer.

“Tsubasa-san,” The Byakugan user started, picking his words carefully. “Your Clan originate from Kumo - you would be more effective at reinstating your people in the Land of Lightning. Why do you not?”

“Because my people may have come from Kumo, but I am a shinobi of Konoha.” She asserts firmly, and I have to admire her resolve, “I am a citizen of the Land of Fire and Konohagakure no Sato and I intend to stay that way. You don’t want to antagonize Kumo or kick up some dust? Fine,
vote how you wish. But even if you do, I will not be leaving - being turned away here would in no way make me abandon those precious to me and that includes my village.”

I sit back in my chair, absentmindedly rubbing behind Kuromaru’s ears. The kid makes good points, and even more importantly she was sincere. For a shinobi it was quite odd to find someone so sincere - and sure, she was manipulative too, but it was the genuine kind of manipulation. The kind where she was clearly manipulating the situation, unafraid and doing it where all could see. She was an honest liar.

This little waif of a girl was the kind of genuine ninja that Minato was - the kind of shinobi that could change the world with enough motivation.

With her and the rest of her team ... the old coots didn’t stand a chance.

“Make her a Clan head - along with the rest of them. Maybe they can bring some life to this dreary place.” I laugh out, Kuromaru growling in agreement.

TSUBASA NOA

Tsume’s laughing statement of support was followed by tense and awkward silence while the Clan Heads all took in how easily Tsume - stubborn Inuzuka Alpha to a fault - so easily changed her opinion.

Perfect. The more focus on me, the less focus on Sasuke and Ruto’s headships. If everyone focused on me, then enough people may assume that it had already been agreed for the Uchiha and Uzumaki Headships to be passed on - which it kinda was - and are less likely to dispute it childishly. Too bad Kakashi couldn’t woman up and take his damn seat -

Baby.

“I too give my support to Tsubasa-sama’s instatement as Clan Head,” Shikaku breaks through the tension lazily. “Her unique position as a foreigner with an outside perspective but internal loyalties may provide perspective on issues that we have yet to address. Is that not what the purpose of this Council is?”

“The Akimichi will stand with the Nara.” Choza chips in helpfully.

“Tsubasa-sama is of good character,” Inoichi put forth. “I have worked with her before on the specifics of her Kekkei Genkai. She is diligent and hardworking - unwilling to take setbacks laying down. An ideal Clan Head.”

I give a demure nod to my supporters, internally cheering for my good fortune. Okay. That’s the Inuzuka and Ino-Shika-Cho - plus the given Uzumaki, Uchiha, and Sarutobi support. There’s still the Kurama, Hyuuga, Aburame, Senju (Tsunade has been surprisingly quiet, oddly enough), the Civilians and the Two advisors and Danzo (Shimura, whatever). That’s seven in my favor, but I need a majority - which means that I need at least six more supporters.

“The Uchiha support the integration of the Tsubasa Clan,” Sasuke calls from where he has taken his rightful place in his father’s old spot. “She has only the best for Konoha in mind.”

No one kicks up a fuss at Sasuke’s assimilation, so there’s that at least -
“The Uzumaki as well,” Ruto adds, sounding mature and far more like how I suppose his father sounded than how his mother did.

“Tsubasa-sama has proven her worth and dedication to this village when she was willing to sacrifice herself for her Hokage. The Sarutobi stand with her.”

Tsunade shifts, the clank of a bottle silencing the quiet discussions throughout the room. “Does anyone have any objections or are we putting this to a vote?”

“Now hold on.” Danzo cuts in for the first time since the debate began. “Are we to assume that with the instatement of the Tsubasa Clan that we are to automatically accept any Tsubasa to waltz up to our doors?”

I frown visibly and hold up a single hand to quiet Sasuke and Ruto’s protests. I turn to address Danzo for the first time actually ever - which is hella stressful - clear my face of emotion.

“Shimura-san, I hope you will understand that I hold my Clan in no higher esteem than you hold yours. Or anyone here holds their own. And certainly not above this village. If a Tsubasa - if any live on - were to come to this village pleading citizenship, then they would be put through the same thorough screening process that any other would. I would never forsake my village for the sake of family -”

“And what of your bloodline?” Danzo continues, not even allowing the last syllables to leave my mouth. “You would fall under the Clan Restoration Act if you become a Clan of Konoha.”

HE DID NOT JUST -

“Shimura,” I bite out, ignoring the clear gasps at the lack of honorifics. “I would appreciate it if you would not patronize me. I am fully aware of the repercussions of becoming a Clan of Konoha - moronic and immoral acts included.”

I take a moment to scan the room, taking a moment to give my attention to each Head, not bothering to hide my irritation. Some looks scandalized - the oldies and the civilians - but other look calculating - the Aburame, Hyuuga.

“The Clan Restoration Act is a last ditch effort for a greedy village with growing - yet ignored - civilian-born talent to attempt to hold onto relics of the past. Old bloodlines mean nothing when they can die and be killed and fail like any other shinobi. The Uzumaki, the Uchiha, the Senju, the Hatake, the Sarutobi - the list goes on. Older talent does not guarantee a strong shinobi!

“And besides, despite myself being an adult, I am 13. If the Council of Konoha is so desperate to breed old bloodlines - regardless of personal opinions or relationships - then somebody better tell Asuma and Kakashi to start knocking some poor girls up! They certainly haven’t been subjected for the last how-many-years-since-the-hit-puberty to the same standards I was expected to meet within ten minutes of walking into this room. Is it because I’m a woman? Or is it because I’m ‘young and naive’? Either way, the restoration of my clan is not relevant to the current proceedings until it becomes relevant to all clans, Shimura-san.”

There is a deafening silence following my speech, and Danzo looks furious, and I can't help but massage the bridge of my nose. “Look, I know that pretty much everything I have said in the last minute or two is highly controversial and rude and insubordinate - call it what you will - but I am trying to establish my position as a Clan Head. If I were willing to sit back and allow those ‘more experienced’ to walk all over me then the title would be worthless.

“I refuse to hide how unhappy I am with many traditions and norms of the current Konoha. I do not
want anarchy - I do not want to usurp our way of life - but as a loyal shinobi of Konohagakure, I feel obligated to do everything in my power for my people and my Hokage. If that means expressing my opinion - which it does - then I will. Deal with it or vote against me, it’s your choice.”

I give the old people time to consider my words as I stand tall under their scrutiny. I will not bend - I will not break. I am a shinobi of Konohagakure no Sato and I will act as such.

“Well then,” Tsunade grits out after the Clan Heads seemed to have finished whispering amongst themselves. “Let’s put this to a vote finally, shall we?

Moment of truth.

“The Inuzuka say yes.”

“The Akimichi vote yes.”

“Nara vote yes.”

“The Yamanaka vote yes.”

“The Uchiha vote yes.”

“I - the Uzumaki - say yes.”

“The Sarutobi vote yes.”

“The Kurama vote no.”

(I force myself not to glare at the moronic inbreds that made up the genjutsu using clan. Didn’t quite want their vote anyhow.)

“The Aburame vote yes.”

( SWEET . Shino’s dad is awesome!)

Four civilians out of twelve vote in my favor before all that are left are -

“The Utatane vote no.”

“The Mitokado vote no.”

“The Shimura vote no.”

(Council was never going to favor someone that they couldn’t control anyway. Expected that. But …)

Two more clans - two more votes. I need two to pass through this.

Tsunade takes a deep draw from her sake cup, looking close to forgoing the saucer all together. “The Senju are for it. Yes.”

That leaves …
“The Hyuuga vote -”

Hiashi cuts himself off, seemingly reconsidering his answer.

“Hyuuga-sama.” I call out, ignoring the glaring looks for interfering. “I will not hold it against you if you wish to protect your Clan and loved one’s from Kumo - you have more obligations to your people than to mine.”

The stoic Clan Head pauses at this and turns to face me - really seeing me for the first time. He looks … I can’t put my finger on it. Calculating? Understanding?

“The Hyuuga vote yes.” He finally states, and I feel my shoulders relax instantly. “Tsubasa Noa will bring much needed perspective to this Council.”

I bow my head lightly, and take my seat.
JIRAIYA

Just as I decide that there was no way that I was going to find my godson’s possible-girlfriend without resorting to asking the Hime, I see her on the streets.

“Oi!” I call out, trying to get the brat’s attention. “Little Feather!”

She stops rather abruptly at the name, and after a moment - that I’m sure was spent convincing herself not to kill me painfully - the little foreign girl whips around.

“Jiraiya,” She greets in a monotone, quite obviously leaving out any and all honorifics. “That nickname is reserved only for Shishou - you are not welcome to it.”

I hold up my hands in joking surrender and take a mocking step back. “Oh! My bad, my bad - don’t have to get so defensive!”

The chunin crosses her arms, cocking a brow in amusement. Snarky little brat - hope Tsunade doesn’t regret bringing her back from the brink. Speaking of, my eyes catch on the medical satchel at her waist and the telltale chakra burns on her wrists. “Starting your training already?”

Noa nods again, this time with a clear underlying current of smugness, “Of course. I never did like being idle.”

Based off what I knew about this kid that wasn’t the half of it. But that’s not why I was here.

“You need something, Pervy Sage?” Noa cuts through my thoughts. “You and I haven’t exactly gotten to know each other well, and certainly not well enough to seek each other out on the streets.”

“Yeah, kid.” I concede, giving a jerk of my head towards one of the local shinobi bars. “Care to talk?”

About 40 minutes in to basic get-to-know-you and idle small talk, the little shit finally shows.
“Maa maa Jiraiya,” Kakashi utters as he slides into a bar stool on the other side of his student. “I knew you were perverted, but I never thought that you would go after sweet little Noa-chan …”

I choke on my sake and Noa’s expression is somewhere between side busting laughter and utter disgust.

“**Oh hell no -**” She exclaims, although her laughter still comes through. “Sorry, but I get enough of that goddamn porn from Kakashi! I can only handle so much of it at once - don’t worry, I can wait as you fight for my hand though. Looser can pick up the tab.”

I will never admit for how long it takes me to recover from the sheer ridiculousness -

“**Aaaaaaaanyway**,” the precocious brat drawls. “Now that you both have me properly cornered, anyone want to tell me what this is about?”

Silence. Neither Hatake nor I decide to start, so eventually Noa just beats us to it.

“This about Ruto?”

At our obvious surprise, she snorts and picks at the edamame in front of her, the only thing she ordered. “Oh come on, *really*? The only thing that all three of us share in common is Ruto. I mean, yes … we also have Konoha. And being unreasonably powerful for our ages. And being kinda famous. And that Orochimaru hates all of us. Or that Tsunade has saved our lives … wait has Tsunade ever treated you Kakashi? OH! Or that -”

“**YES .**” I quench her tirade. “This is about Naruto.”

“Lemme guess - you two want to talk to Ruto about something and you want me to help you go about it so you’ll a) survive, b) not be seriously maimed, and 3) still have him liking you afterwards?”

A pause.

“Thought so.” Noa - suddenly - quick as a flash has my sake bottle in hand and takes a deep swig. I manage to snatch it back as Kakashi gives some sort of undignified, indignant squawk and Noa flags down the bartender for her own drink. “I was going to need that for this conversation.” She explains dryly.

“Anyway - Ruto. This about how you want to somehow justify how both his father’s teacher and student - one of you being godfather for that matter - left him completely alone during his childhood to suffer abuse and discrimination? Or is it how the two of you are currently locking fist in an argument over who teaches Ruto from here on out? Or - is it that you need to give him the talk and want to know what he knows already so that you don’t have to say more than you have to on it?”

The chunin’s drink arrives and two thirds of us sit in a sort of shell shocked silence as she takes her first shot.

“Is it the third one? Cuz if it’s the third one I’m out.”

“No, Chibi-chan.” Her sensei manages to get out eventually. “It is not the third one. It’s kind of the first two.”

I finally find my voice and clear my throat pointedly, my voice coming out rougher than usual.
“And how do you know all of that, Chibi-chan?”

She shoots another glare at me before going back for her salted soy beans. “Nicknames, Pervy Sage. First off, have either of you actually looked at Ruto? You have more than five brain cells, read a textbook, and actually care and you know he’s literally the Yellow Flash’s legacy. Secondly, Jiraiya - you do realize that you got that book published right? Naruto isn’t exactly a common name, and everyone knows you taught the Yondaime, and that the Yondaime taught Kakashi.”

The medic in training studies the drink in her hand for a bit, finding her words. “Jiraiya - I don’t like you. I get you’re accomplished and powerful - that you have responsibilities, but I don’t like you.”

Noa looks up at me, and I give a start as I see true anger and frustration in the young girls gaze. She was serious.

“I do not blame Kakashi for how Ruto grew up, not fully. But I do blame you. The Sandaime was your teacher, yes, but that is no reason not to fight back for what was right for Minato’s son. Or have you forgotten your student, like all of Minato and Kushina’s friends seem to have?”

The Last Tsubasa’s voice is rising, and we’re starting to gain notice from those around us but she doesn't seem to care. Kakashi is being useless and just sitting back. “You were all he had - Kakashi was what, fourteen? You were a 38 year old, perfectly capable shinobi who could’ve used fuinjutsu to work a R&D job in the village! You LEFT HIM! To these people!”

Noa is standing now, gesturing wildly to all of the shinobi around us, everyone’s eyes are on us. “I hate you because you left! I hate you, because I shouldn’t have had to be the one to tell Ruto who his parents were! I hate this godforsaken village because it’s people hate indiscriminately,” She hisses lowly, her eyes wild. “I have sat back for years doing nothing because I had no power to backup my words - but guess what? I’m a goddamn Clan Head now and what’s the use of the title if I can’t put morons like you into your place, huh? You want him to forgive you? Well maybe he won’t! But I can guarantee that the longer you put this off the more he will blow up once he finds out on his own!”

I stare numbly as Noa grabs her satchel from beneath the bar and leans over to give Kakashi’s cheek a kiss goodbye. “I have got to stop going on shouting rampages - it can’t be good for my blood pressure,” She huffed at him - squeezing his shoulder before she sauntered out of the bar, leaving a bar full of shinobi to stare at her retreating back.

Kakashi leans over to snag both mine and Noa’s drinks, pouring himself a generous serving. “Well,” he starts, before pausing to take a shot. “You can’t say that you didn’t deserve that.”

TSUBASA NOA

40 hours shifts suck -

I cannot physically feel my feet. Or my hands. Or my chakra systems. Or anything for that matter …

I’m dead.

I trudge through the hospital halls, trying feebly to rub some life into my eyes, and it is then that I
run into her.

My shinobi pride is injured by how I tripped (Over my own feet? Over a chair? Over a cart? Who knew?) and fell right into one of the civilian medical interns, knocking the poor girl off her feet.

I immediately apologize and reach down to pull her up on her feet, only to freeze dead at the sight of her hair -

Her *pastel pink* hair.

“*Holy fucking shit-*” Is all I can get out as I stare at - who is in another life - the final member of Team 7.

“*Sakura*!” I holler down the hall, searching for my favorite assistant as my shift begins. “Where are you? I need the census on genin chakra exhaustion rates but I can’t find them!”

I hear the distant patter of heals on the linoleum floors of the hospital and wait for only another moment before I saw a flash of pink locks headed my way - long, glorious locks flowing in the light AC.

“Keep your hitai-ate on!” The Neo Sannin of another life growlingly laughs, “I’ve got them right here - no need to get snappy!”

“*Oh thank god!*” I can’t help but exclaim. “I swear, I would lose my kunai if they weren’t strapped to my thigh.”

“Do you even need them, Fancy-Kekkei-Genkai-chan?” Sakura teases, handing me the stack which I immediately begin to tear through. “Anyway, I didn’t expect you to be back in so soon - didn’t you have a mission today?”

“Nah,” I get out through the pen between my lips. “I had one yesterday, it just was a quickie.”

“Huh,” the nurse lets out noncommittally, going back to doing the kind of productive things she was supposed to do which she kindly set aside for my occasional incompetence. We work through those at the nurse’s station - me at the counter and Sakura at my side, going through stacks of numbers and papers to get some kind of semblance of conclusion from them until -

“So!” A familiar voice calls out from behind me. “You got a sec?”

“Sure Sasuke,” I call back over a shoulder, barely tearing my eyes away from very detailed graph in front of me. “I just gotta -”

“Sasuke-kun?” Sakura blurs out, cutting me off. “I didn’t -”

An awkward silence permeates, and I look up to see Sakura blushing furiously at my kinda-brother as he looks on the situation with something between confusion and apprehension. I raise an eyebrow and clear my throat pointedly, “Sakura, is there a problem? Sasuke here was just going to ask me about … ?” I trail off, giving Sasuke a pointed looks to do something -

Ever resilient, he complies. “Harano-san, I have not seen you for some time, hello.” He greets perfuncitonally. “I need to borrow Noa for a moment, if you would excuse us.”

He practically dragged me away from the desk and I stomp down forcefully on the laugh rising in
my chest, ‘Now is not the time to make fun of Sasuke, Noa.’

“What’s wrong, Sasuke-kun?” I finally get out through the building humor, teasing mercilessly, “I thought that you would’ve wanted to catch up.”

“Oh hell no.” Sasuke grots out, shivering unconsciously. “Haruno may have quit well before the worst of the fangirling started, but she was still very bad.”

I can’t hold that particular snicker, doing her best to crush down the what-ifs running circles through my head. “Don’t be mean,” I chide gently, determined to make sure that Sakura could at least be on speaking terms with as many of the Rookie 12 as I could. “She’s an amazing medical student, on the way to being a great civilian medic and doctor. She’s grown; don’t write her off. You know how much people can change.”

The Last Loyal Uchiha grunts noncommittally, before shaking himself out of his head. “That wasn’t why I came,” He suddenly seems to recall (honestly, the entirety of Team 7 was dysfunctional to some degree - Kakashi was late and perverted, I was foreign and too old for my body, Naruto was - I’m pretty sure - either ADD or ADHD, and as rare as it was when Sasuke got of topic, he got off topic. It was kinda funny. Guess what they say is true: the more powerful the shinobi, the crazier they are. Or maybe it was just Konoha …).

“And …?” I trial off, waiting as patiently as I could as he tried to remember what he came for. My boys were such idiots. “You were saying?”

“Oh, yeah. I need you to fix my shoulder.” Sasuke finally remembers finally - about time he -

Wait -

“Fix. Your shoulder.” I deadpan, silently counting to ten to resist running him through on a freshly made Sai.

“Yup.”

The cheeky bastard.

~~~

After ten minutes of forced regulated breathing and lots of convincing - from both parties - I managed to drag the stubborn idiot into the on-call room for treatment on the condition that he would be paying for the supplies out of pocket and I would keep it out of his charts.

No one told me being on a genin team with a possibly-traitorous, probably-avenger Uchiha (but only in an alternate reality that may no longer exist) would be so weird -

I take one look at the wound and I cannot physically repress the strangled sound that came out of my mouth.

“What the hell hit you?” I demand, examining the bladelike slice running from my teammate’s collarbone to upper back. “These chakra burns can’t be from a blade - not even one of mine. What did you do?”

“Sparred with Naruto.” Sasuke confessed warily, and again I make another noise, more feral.

“Stupid men and their stupid destructive training sessions -” I growl low and fierce as I begin to knit his cells back together, brow furrowed in concentration. This was going to take a lot out of
“That’s it,” I decide after I feel my reserves drop below half. “You owe me chakra—that’s a new, additional fee. Call it the cost for keeping this from me for so long.”

He groans, but I have no sympathy. “You have huge reserves, Uchiha,” I remind him. “You’re going home to sleep—I have an entire five hours of my shift left. Gimme.”

He sighed resignedly, and without letting me even finish healing him he gathers chakra into his palm and beings pumping it into one of my tenketsu—the one on my waist, the closest he could reach—and I double time my healing, reusing Sasuke’s own chakra to speed his own healing process.

“You’re getting better at that,” Sasuke comments absentmindedly as he feels his chakra returns. “First couple weeks you could barely take it in, much less push it back out again.”

I snort derisively, “A couple of weeks ago if I had used my chakra I would have died—literally. I’m amazing.”

At my shameless hubris, he laughs—a sound few people have ever heard—and I can’t help but smile myself.

“Yes,” Sasuke agrees, humor lacing his words. “Yes, you are.”
THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM - PART TWO

Chapter Summary

“We should keep this a secret.” I chime out suddenly, cutting through the silence of our chess game. Noa looks up at me, searching for the meaning behind my serious words in my eyes. “Us, I mean.”

My ...(kami-what-even-are-we?) - Noa sits up fully, straightening her spine and locking eyes with me, the game forgotten. “Is there a…” She trials off, and I rush to fill the void. ‘Is there a problem?’ She doesn’t say.

“No,” I insist, low but firm. “But we have to be careful. The number of people after you - the people you have pissed off or intrigued or whatever - is growing every day. The less information that they have to hold against you or manipulate you with the better.”

“And what about the people who already ... know?” Noa asks, she too unsure about the status of our strange, tiptoeing relationship.

“It’s ... technically not official, so I haven’t told anyone.” I explain lowly, eyes back on the board. “And the same number of people who think I’m together with you think you’re with Sasuke or Naruto.”

A pause.

“It’s not?”

I look up at her to see that she too had her eyes fixed on the game. “Official, I mean.”

I gulp, steeling myself, “Do you want it to be?”

She doesn’t even hesitate, “Yes.”

I bury a smile, moving to evade her knight, “Troublesome woman.”

“Your troublesome woman,” Noa corrects me smugly.

~~~

UCHIHA SASUKE
“That council meeting was so dull!” Naruto complains loudly as we exit the Hokage Tower complex. “When I’m Fire Shadow, the council meetings will be much more exciting!”

Noa snorts beside him, flipping through her medical journal, noting something down. “Sure, that will happen. The only way that you could make these more interesting would be to get rid of all the stuffy old people.”

Noa seems to immediately regret the comment, as Naruto’s eyes light up like they do when he is planning one of his better pranks. “Naruto,” I hurry to derail him. “You can’t get rid of half the council - that’s got to be treason of some sort.”

As Naruto begins to pout, I think back to the meeting. Yes, it was mostly boring as Naruto had complained but there was also a short debate on the ANBU medical files and their redaction. It ended as quickly as it started, but it got me thinking …

“Sasuke?” Noa cuts through my thoughts, “You okay? Something on your mind?”

I work to find my words as we slide into Ichiraku’s. “You and Naruto are well on the way to achieving your goals …” I start, unsure of how to continue.

“You’re worried about joining Special Ops.” Noa supplies me.

“Yes.” I follow along, and vaguely processing that Naruto has tuned in to what we were saying. “I feel … late.”

At that Naruto snorts, stirring his miso ramen before he speaks, “That’s dumb - if you had joined a year ago you wouldn’t have been ready - you’ve learned so much under Scarecrow. And anyway, even if you join right now you’d be one of the youngest in the history of the Ops - only, like, your brother and our teacher beat you there.”

“As far as we know,” Noa corrects, but seems to agree with him. “Honestly Sasuke, so you feel like you’re late? Okay, let’s fix it. Do you want to join right now? Or would you rather do some further training beforehand? What can we do?”

I really should stop being surprised by how well Noa can cut to the center of an issue.

“I don’t know,” I switch back to Common, signalling how I’m done talking about this now. “I’ll just have to think on it.”

“You do that,” Noa smiles - before turning to her own ramen and dropping all conversation.

‘I’ll have to think on it.’

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**YAKUSHI KABUTO**

“Orochimaru-sama, are you sure this is a good idea?” I can’t help but ask, examining the orders for the Sound Four. “This kind of hasty movement may be considered … reckless.”

Orochimaru hisses in pain as he shifts to face me, his arms jolted by the movement, “Yes, it is reckless. But if it succeeds - as it must - then not only will I have the Sharingan, I will also have an advantage over that blasted Tsubasa. She is too soft hearted to ever damage the body of her teammate, no matter who is wearing it.”
I stifle a sigh, slightly irritated over how much attention that brat was getting from Orochimaru-sama. Noa may have attacked me during the exams, but I doubted that in a true battle - where neither party was holding back - she would be able to defeat me.

But kidnapping the Uchiha Clan Head in order to overpower a Tsubasa child? For the sake of my master, I hope it goes well.

For my sake? Let them fail, the Uchiha is too untrained now to be any use to Otogakure as anything other than a nuisance.

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**UMINO IRUKA**

“**INCOMING !**”

I bolt to the window in an instant at the familiar cry - throwing open the window to my classroom between breaths, lecture forgotten. I have just enough time to notice the confused and somewhat frightened looks on my students faces - except for Konohamaru, who looks like he knows what's going on - before my former student literally flies through the window.

On the enormous chakra wings she was still only barely able to control.

As she quickly reabsorbs her chakra, I shut the window with a sigh and prepare myself for a long day. Twenty minutes into the day and I can just feel the oncoming questions and demands for demonstrations -

Noa owed me dango for this.

“**Noa,**” I grit out, rubbing my scar in a feeble attempt to calm myself down. “I know by now you’ve fixed your little ‘landing problem,’ so why do you feel the need to dive-bomb my class?”

The little menace only pouts cutely, pushing herself up to sit on the edge of my desk as my class sat frozen in awe, “Aww Sensei!” The chunin protests, “Just because I know how doesn’t mean I will. I know how to detonate the entirety of Training Grounds 44, but I won’t .”

Great. Just great.

Konohamaru suddenly remembers his voice, and jumps up to run to the Tsubasa Clan Head, “You saved my Jiji!”

Noa looks down blankly at the young Sarutobi before snapping her fingers, making the connection. “**Oh! You’re Konohamaru !** The Old Geezer talks about you all the time - so does the Ruto for that matter.”

Konohamaru beams at being recognized by name by one of his idols - and for being talked about by his ‘rival’ and his grandfather. “**Yeah! I’m gonna be a super strong ninja like you someday, and then I’ll be able to save other people’s Jiji’s!**”

A swell of pride grows in my chest, and I watch happily as Noa ruffles Konohamaru’s hair with a smile on her face.

And then the classroom detonates.
Everyone - even the civilian born kids - had heard about the young genin who had nearly died saving the Sandaime's life, and they were just now connecting the dots. The sheer noise in the room drowned out any distinguishable syllables, and Noa looks irritatingly amused as I attempt to gain the attention of the class back.

After a couple minutes of yelling and a twitch of chakra, she hands me a ready-made megaphone.

“QUIET!” I holler into it, feeling my head swell. “QUIET!!”

The lunch bell rings, and I have just enough time to get to my desk chair before collapsing into it.

“Now you wonder why I decided to become a medic?” Noa asks rhetorically, cheek dripping off her words, “Blood, gore, and dying patients is nothing compared to teaching - you should try it sometime. Your control’s pretty good!”

“Which control?” I ask, voice barely audible. “My self-control, my control over the class, or my chakra control?”

“All three, even if it got a bit rowdy there.” She decides after a pause, pushing herself off the table. “Annoying you was only a small part of why I came, though.”

The seriousness in her voice gave me pause, and I push my head off my desk to look at her.

“I came because of this,” Noa continued, holding out three packages of what looked to be books, each bound thickly with cloth and plastic and string. Whatever the packages were, they weren’t meant to be opened lightly. I take them wordlessly, examining them with curiosity - confused on why she would give them to me.

“If I die,” Noa starts, and I snap up to look at her but am cut off before I could protest at the notion, “Hold on Iruka! This is important!”

I sit back in my chair, and she takes off again. “Okay, if I die I need you to give these to someone on my team - doesn’t really matter who, I wrote for them to be shared. They need to be read if I kick it before I can tell someone what is written in them. Okay?”

I struggle to find the words - obviously, this was some kind of safeguard, but against what? What did she have to hide? I doubted anything important she would write would be in anything but English, and this was obviously not intended for me to know but -

“Why me?” I finally settle on, finding the question safe.

“Because I trust you,” My old student states bluntly, and as long as I’ve known her she has never told me that. “I never taught you English because you would have become a target, and of the people I have taught you are the least protected. Why give you these? You won’t and can’t read them before the time comes, and because if someone comes looking for classified information about a dead girl, they’d go to my team and Gai, not you. You are the furthest from my closest circle that I can still trust and I need to do this.”

I nodded mutely, and she pushes herself off my desk - walking towards the door.

“Thank you, Iruka-sensei.” Noa quietly calls out as she pushes open the door and waltzes out into the hallway, leaving me with the three packages encompassing her last will and testament.
UZUMAKI NARUTO

Three weeks after Nee-chan planted the idea into my head, I decided to talk with the Fox.

I wait until Noa has a shift and Sasuke and Kakashi head out to do some kind of espionage training exercise or whatever those ANBU types do to train.

The house is empty, but it feels too silent so I gather my gear and Sushin to the top of the Hokage monument, right over my father’s head (and oh boy isn’t that strange to think). I settle to meditate, thinking back to what I knew about mindscapes. It takes a moment, my breathing circulating rhythmically, before I find myself falling down -

Splash.

I’m in an enormous cavern with walls and ceilings so high I couldn’t even make them out, stale air surrounding me. As I sit up, I feel the displacement of ankle deep water around me - tiny waves rippling out from each ripple I made. The cavern isn’t … dark, but it isn’t light either. The water seems slightly fluorescent, giving off a faint blue light - barely visible, but enough to see by. After all, there certainly is no sun down here.

So this my mindscape. Huh, I needed to redecorate down here.


Tearing myself out of my thoughts (wait, no. I’m literally in my thoughts. Wait …)

Changing my focus, I begin to look around for the Fox ...

I give out a very unmanly yelp in surprise. Apparently I just needed to turn a 180.

Here goes. Start simple.

“Ohaiyo!”

No response. That won’t do, I didn’t want to be a bad … host?

Whatever.

I approach the cage - gilded and detailed - that took up a large expanse of my mindscape. The kitsune behind the bars was huge, bigger than even Gamabunta by a factor of ten. Their fur was crimson red, the color of blood, and their ears were longer in a rather rabbitlike way. Most noticeable of all, though, was their nine tails were curled around their body like a blanket - hiding their eyes from my view while still leaving their sharp teeth exposed to the world.

Or just me, really. Cuz this was my mindscape, and all.

“What do you want, brat?” The Kyuubi growls out, eyes still hidden by their tails, although I had no doubt that they were still tightly shut.

“To talk.” I comment as if it was obvious. “I don’t want to be a Jinchuriki, and you don’t want to
be stuck in me. Problem is neither of us can actually exist without the other because of my tou-san’s seal (which I am sorry about by the way), so we might as well get to know each other.”

I let out a huff of air after my brief speech, and wait patiently as the Kyuubi begins to slowly peel tail by tail away from their eyes until they lock their crimson eyes on me with, full of … something I couldn’t identify.

“You want … to talk.” They deadpan, eyes narrowing.

“Yup!” I confirm, sitting down and kicking back against the bars. “Starting with introductions! I’m Uzumaki Naruto, although I guess I’m a Namikaze too? Anyway, I’m a chunin of Konohagakure no Sato, and the Clan Head of the Uzumaki Clan! What’s your name?”

The Kyuubi snaps their head around to face me quick as lightning, eyes narrowed - assessing. “…You have not proven yourself worthy of using my name.” The Kyuubi declares with some force, although something tells me that the fact that I asked at all won me points. “I am the Kyuubi Kitsune, and I am the eldest of the Bijuu - the most powerful with the most tails.”

I whistle lowly, impressed. “Woah, I guess I lucked out by having you be my partner, huh? But no name…” I trail off, thinking. “My Nee-chan says that an English word for fox is ‘renyard,’ but that’s a bit masculine. Are you a male?”

“Yes.” The bijuu confirms, sounding amused. “I care not what you call me, Kit. This ‘Nee-chan’ sounds like an interesting one, to know such an odd tongue.”

“She sure is! She’s the best sister ever!” I cheer, glad to have gotten somewhere with the fox. “Renyard it is! One day - when I prove my worth - I’ll be able to use your real name!”

Renyard snorts in reluctant amusement, shifting to lay his tails back over his eyes, “Sure you will, Kit.”
Chapter Summary

“Lot of nerve you have,” I get out, shifting my stance. “Attacking a Clan Head.”

Chapter Notes

Just so you all know, the language in this chapter will be slightly stronger than in past chapters. Noa herself is a rather explicit character - at least in terms of language - but I mostly have her sticking to f-bombs, damns, and shits - but the character Tayuya is written as very explicit. The slurs that I use are not written to target any persons or people, and I want to make clear that the use of such slurs disgust me, and I do not wish to offend, only accurately portray a character.

Read at your own discretion,

- Milo Of The Key

UCHIHA SASUKE

I cough harshly, clots of blood splattering the pavement - I have a broken rib at the very least. The pain grates against my senses, and I roughly push myself off the street.

Through the pain and the blow to my head I manage to make out four figures, each with markings marring their skin and spreading like fungus. Imposing, to say the least. I may not be a sensor like Naruto or Noa, but the sheer amount of chakra radiating off of these four figures is staggering - and I know that even as skilled as I am I have no chance.

But no way am I giving up though.

Fucking ambushes -

I struggle to my feet, kunai in hand - but my asalians simply look amused.

“Lot of nerve you have,” I get out, shifting my stance. “Attacking a Clan Head.”

A girl with red hair merely snorts, reaching into a pouch for something, “Yeah, sure you faggot. A
Clan Head pussy trash who can’t even defend himself - some shinobi you are, retard.”

One of her companions, a looming, orange-haired figure frowns at the girl, “Tayuya, a girl should not use such cruel language - even if he is pitifully disappointing.”

I growl unconsciously at the slight, but the girl - Tayuya - has retrieved what was in her pouch and I need to focus. Before I can even process what she’s clutching, a tan shinobi with six arms has spat something - a lot of somethings - at me and I am too slow, getting hit.

Webbing?

Struggling against the binding is futile, as even my kunai can’t get through it. I focus, trying to replicate the cutting of the Chidori along the blade of my kunai but -

A melody is filling my ears and even as my brain tells me something is wrong, I can’t block it out. The music is beautiful and soothing, and with too much effort I turn my head to see Tayuya playing on a flute -

My vision fades to black, and I don’t even have time to panic before I fall into a deep sleep.

TSUBASA NOA

“Well, Miyabi-san,” I assure the merchant in the exam room. “These antibiotics should clear out that nasty infection before it can eat away at any more of you. Remember: even if you think the infection is gone, you have to finish up the prescription or you’ll just be right back here in another week.”

“Thank you, Medic-san.” The woman gushes, glad to be out of here. “Don’t worry, I’ll finish it all off.”

“Good,” I smile as I follow after my patient - calling after her as she heads toward the lobby, “Don’t forget to come in if it’s not gone by the time your prescription ends!”

The woman waves me goodbye, and I headed back to the locker room with a bounce in my step. Kakashi is due back in the village by dinner, and we’re going to have dinner with all of Team 7 tonight for the first time since we all became chunin - what with the whole prove-your-strength-after-an-invasion period winding down. I push open the door when -

“Holy shit!” I yelp, pressing a palm to my chest, “Don’t you people knock?”

The ANBU - Boar, who I’m pretty sure was Genma - doesn’t respond to the absurdity of my question, reacting in their standard monotone. “Tsubasa-san. You are to report directly to T&I, immediately.”

I blink, jerking back in surprise. “I’m sorry, what?”

Instead of responding, maybe-probably-Genma has my upper arm in his hand and we’re Sushin-ing at top speed.

Top speed meant urgent. Top speed as an ANBU meant holy-fucking-god- shit -get-your-ass-over-here- ASAP-my-GOD.
This wasn’t good.

I’m locked in a cell with Shikaku, Tsunade, and Genma(?)/Boar hovering outside and no one is telling me what’s going on!

Be patient, Noa. Don’t blow your top at the father of your boyfriend-maybe, mentor, and old torture-teacher. Bad idea. Bad move all around.

A messenger comes and goes - no one I recognize - before they finally come in.

“What the heck is this about?” I half-demand, frustrated with missing my dinner. “I’ve been here for two hours, six minutes, and 49 seconds. Did I break a law I never knew existed? Am I under suspect for treason? Cuz the worst I’ve done is yell at a couple people, like four times. That’s not a lot.”

Tsunade only purses her lips, ignoring my outburst in favor of consulting a rather official looking file. Shikaku gives me a look of what might be humorous pity - but I can’t tell - while Genma-ish remains stoic beside him.

“Well?” I demand, my patience wearing thin. “What’s going on?”

“Noa, this is serious,” Tsunade warns and chides all in one. “You are here in protective custody.”

“You couldn’t have told me this two hours ago?” I question, surprised and annoyed.

“What’s so hard about going all ‘Tsubasa-san. Come to T&I so we can make sure you don’t get killed. You’re not being framed, don’t worry!’ when you drop me off in here?”


Continued silence.

“What even was the point of you coming in here if you weren’t going to talk to me?” I whine, directly addressing Shikaku, who I’m pretty sure had the highest chance of responding. “I’m boooooooooooored ~”

Continued silence. So being childish wouldn’t work then.

“Seriously ?”

Shikaku touched the bridge of his nose six times in the last twenty minutes. Genma hasn’t moved, but Tsunade has turned the page eighteen times and gone back a page three times.

I’m bored for real now.

“When was the last time you drained your chakra?” Tsunade asks suddenly, eyes on me for the first time since she walked in.

“Ummmm …” I thought on that. “Well not drained but I was close to exhaustion around four weeks ago, give or take three days. I was doing that femur reconstruction assist right after back to
back shifts and I crashed after sticking a banana bag in my arm.”

“So you didn’t leave the hospital.” Shikaku clarified, leaning forward in his seat.

“No, I fell asleep in the on-call room.” I confirmed, ongoingly confused. “What’s this about.”

“Flare your chakra,” Tsunade demanded instead of an answer.

I comply. A thoughtful moment passes.

“Push it out of the point that the Curse Seal was affecting,” Tsunade commands again, and I’m beginning to see where this was going.

I comply again, releasing from the other tenketsu along my back for good measure.

“She’s got nothing left in her system,” Tsunade confirms, addressing Shikaku.

He nods, also not addressing me. “Good.”

“Trying to be patient here,” I butt in - honestly trying to keep my voice level. “But this ‘invisible girl’ routine got old three hours ago. What’s happening?”

Tsunade sighs, finally addressing me. “Orochimaru has made a move, sending Oto nin into the village to target our shinobi. It is being dealt with, but we wanted to ensure that there were no lingering effects of the Seal on you and that you were who you appear.”

I read between the lines, and I feel my pulse quicken.

“No.” I quietly call them out, strain in my voice. “You were trying to see if I was an imposter, bringing the closest qualified Nara you knew of to see if I was me. And I am - I clearly am - so you tried to write if off as security. If you really wanted to check for Orochimaru’s chakra-hickey, you would’ve pushed your own chakra into my system to see if you could feel it. But you didn't, because you already did that - multiple times since we first met.”

Tsunade holds my stare, and there’s an undercut of worry in her gaze that should not be there -

“Why would I be an imposter?”

NARA SHIKAMARU

“Is this really all the people we can get?” Naruto asked in a low voice, examining the gathering of genin in front of us.

Rock Lee was stretching vigorously aside a very put upon Neji, although beneath their exterior I could tell they were worried as well. Choji was carbo-loading before we left, chip bag after chip bag disappearing in an instant while Kiba and Akamaru watched on with mild disgust. Four genin and two chunin for a rescue mission of a Clan Head and Konoha chunin - we should’ve had more.

“Apparently so,” I grit out, working hard to hide my irritation at our chances. “Our main selling for this team is that we have you, a powerhouse. Everyone else is just backup.”

“Except you,” He snorts. “Granny put you in charge, not me. You’re the brains here.”
“Hey!” Kiba calls out, interrupting my half hearted glare at the Uzumaki Clan Head. “Why isn’t Noa here? She’s super powerful - and she’s, like, in love with Sasuke or whatever.”

Deep breath. Count to ten - he doesn't know. That’s a good thing. Deep breath -

“Because she’s a target, too,” Naruto explains dryly, skillfully hiding his worry about both of his teammates. “Why would you send another target on a rescue mission?”

“Enough chatter,” I command, examining our team. “We have work to do.”

“He’s mine!” Choji bellows. “I’ll take care of him.”

All that is running through my head over and over again is the image of Noa; seal work marring her features as her breath comes slow and shallow.

“Choji,” I assert as I swallow a soldier pill. “You better catch up.”

“Alright,” He agrees, preparing to face down Jirobo - hand reaching toward his family pills.

As we shushin away, I find myself praying:

‘Kami, give us strength.’

And so we move forward.

A butterfly flies past me, it’s wings twitching in the wind.

I tell myself that there are no such things as omens - that it’s stupid to think that he had to use his third pill just because a bug passed me by.

I don’t think I’m fooling myself.

“Go,” Neji commands, Byakugan activated. “I’ll take care of him.”

And I can’t protest, because we need to keep moving forward and Neji is the best equipped to deal with this ‘Kidomaru.’

But Choji is gone and we can’t go back for him, and a single person advantage against people who could get the drop on Sasuke isn’t that much of an advantage.

But there is no choice here - no good ones.

“Alright, let’s go.”

And our numbers have dropped yet again.
Just as Kiba and Naruto land aside the coffin containing Sasuke, another player enters the field. Immediately I know that he’s bad news - the power, the stance, the words … The way he scares the absolute shit out of the rest of the Sound Four.

This Kimimaro is dangerous -

“Go after him!” I shout to Lee and Naruto, teeth gritting at being unable to see either the coffin or Kiba and Akamaru. “I’ll handle her! Just go!”

And they go, leaving me alone to face a girl with a flute. A very dangerous girl with a flute.

‘Troublesome…’

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**NARA SHIKAKU**

“You can’t sideline me like this when my teammate has been kidnapped!” Noa growls, bearing down on her master and leader. “I should be out there!”

“No, you shouldn’t!” Tsunade growls right back, rising to her full height to loom over her apprentice. “You are just as much a target as Sasuke is!”

“He’s my teammate!”

“And Orochimaru was mine!” Tsunade finally burst, leaking KI and radiating tension. “And I know him. He’s using this to try and lure you out! He already has one of his targets, I’m not giving him another. Certainly not my own apprentice, you brat.”

Noa looks taken aback, and I remember that no one has ever really looked out for her - not like this. Gai became like her older brother early on, but he was a jounin who only recently got his own genin team - he was never really there. Kakashi was her sensei, but his focus was split between the entirety of the team. Tsunade wasn’t like that. Despite that Shizune was technically still her apprentice, the mousy woman was jounin level easily had little more to learn from the Sannin.

Was Tsunade the first adult to ever really focus just on Noa?

Did she even know what that was like?

I don’t like the answer I found to that.

“Who went?”

The Godaiime searches Noa’s face carefully before answering, “Nara Shikamaru leading with second in command Uzumaki Naruto. Inuzuka Kiba as a tracker with secondary scout Hyuuga Neji, and Rock Lee and Akimichi Choji as muscle back up.”

Noa’s eyes narrow, and I can see the wheels churning behind her eyes.

“Only two chunin and four genin to retrieve a kidnapped clan head?” The Tsubasa grits out, fists clenched. “And no medic? No backup?”
“The village is rebuilding,” Tsunade justifies, but even she can see the flaws in such logic. “We had no choice.”

A tense void fills the room as Noa seethes in anger. Time hangs on until a messenger bursts into the room - a chunin. “Hokage-sama!” The young man cries, waving a missive wildly. “Jiraiya-sama has just returned with critical information on the…”

Quicker than lightning, Noa is out the door and around the chunin - her chakra growing more distant by the millisecond.

“That BRAT” Tsunade bellows, glaring furiously at the door and the poor messenger who opened it.

“We should’ve put a seal on her,” I comment dryly.

“Shut up, Shikaku.”
This is all my fault.

Thank you so much for putting up with my crazy crazy schedule so far! As a special thank you for sticking with me, you all get a extra long chapter! Enjoy!

Lots of Love!

-Milo Of The Key

They don’t have time to stop me before I’m literally flying out of T&I - my wings tucked close to my body to keep from skimming the walls -

This is all my fault.

Did I have the right to withhold this much information? True, I’ve done a lot, changed a lot - but also so much of it still applies despite how much I have changed. Sasuke still - at age 13 - has been removed from the village by the Sound Four.

That wasn’t supposed to happen, not after I took the curse mark for him.

How much of this is all set in stone? Is it really destiny?

Naruto - the plot, the story - is based around fate. Around reincarnation and the recurring theme of two brothers: Indra and Asura, Madara and Hashirama, Sasuke and Naruto. Were my boys destined to be separated? To butt heads? To fight?

No, I couldn’t allow that. Not a chance -

But I wasn’t supposed to be here. Seeing Sakura all those weeks ago -

That proved how out of place I was.
I refused to think about it much, really. The thought that I was the alien here - I was the one who was ruining the future. Naruto - the original timeline - had a happy ending, in the end. The war destroyed many, but in the end it brought peace.

Right?

But left alone Madara and Tobi and the Ten-Tails and Orochimaru and Danzo and Kabuto killed thousands - started a war that lasted less than a week but killed indiscriminately, horribly.

How much could I prevent? How much could I change? How much would it take to kill me?

Could I change anything? This day seemed to disprove that.

How did I get here? Why am I here?

‘No!’ I slap myself, coming back to the present - dodging trees and feeling for chakra. ‘It doesn’t matter! If you save one person then you’ve done some good!’

I have to believe that or I’ll go mad.

---

Choji is the first one I find.

I can feel my heart stutter and stop in my chest - one beat missed, two -

But then I’m back moving again, letting my training as a medic take over as I begin to pump what would amount to gallons of chakra into him -

Steady the heartbeat. Reinforce tissue. Encourage and force every single endoplasmic reticulum to pump out lipids at top speed - reinforcing connections and repairing damage. Repair his chakra pathways; recycle his own chakra to heal him.

Pop a soldier pill - start again. Next his lungs.

Another pill - liver, pancreas, stomach and small intestine and large intestine -

(I’m getting dizzy, the side effects of the pills)

Finished his internal organs - then his right arm, his left. Another pill - his legs.

I can’t stop.

The Akimichi drags in a startled, painful breath and I allow myself to breathe easier.

For a half a second.

I don’t want to leave him, but if Choji is in this shape then - I don’t want to think about it. I have to move!

I send up a flare and drop every nutrient bar I had in Choji’s lap, barely sparing the downed and dead Oto nin a glance before my wings are back out and I’m launching myself into the air again, chakra rippling out from me like sonar.
I’m popping three soldier pills in my mouth before I even land next to Neji, crunching on the foul medicine as I reach the Hyuuga. Unlike Choji however, the older boy is conscious.

“Tsubasa,” He chokes out, blood and fatigue marrying his words. “You shouldn’t be here -”

He cuts himself off as he begins to cough up blood, and I hastily begin to repair the clean hole through his shoulder that just missed his heart. “Don’t talk you dummy!” I quietly exclaim, distracted by the readouts that my diagnostic jutsu was giving me. “Trying to save your life, asshole. If I wasn’t here you could’ve died!”

He loses consciousness before he can argue back.

Healing Neji took more time than I wanted. Two holes clean through the body can take a bit to heal, apparently. Patch job or not.

It was worth it though, totally worth it to have him suitably closed up and stable by the time I finished - but I was low on chakra and tired and late and too many more soldier pills and I’d OD. This wasn’t ideal in the least.

But there was still the rest of the Team desperately needing backup. Kiba and Akamaru should be closest to me, if the original matchups were to be believed. Them and the twins, Sadon and Udon? Something like that.

Having Lee from the get go would change things, however. I couldn’t predict what those would be.

I push forward with a newfound spur of speed.

**INUZUKA KIBA**

I gently cradle Akamaru; the worry in my gut for my companion smarting more than the kunai wound to my stomach - (two, actually. I have two. Blood loss is getting to me). I clutch the wounds feebly, and somehow I know that I should be in more pain than I am.

Am I going into shock? Hana said that wounded ninkin go into shock when they are in too much pain to process. Is it the same for people? Must be - dogs and humans are more alike than most people think.

I can’t go into shock. I can’t. Akamaru and my team and stuck up Sasuke and even that stupid Noa with the fancy kekkei genkai need me and I can’t give up -

As I hear the stupidly overpowered Sound nin approach, I look to the river - the beginnings of a plan running rampant through my mind.

‘Dammit! He wore my own jacket to confuse me with a familiar scent!’ Is my only clear thought as one of the twins - if they are even separate or different at all - bare down on me, kunai in hand and
dramatic end-speech on his lips.

Knowing I can’t beat him - that I am going to die - is sobering.

I should’ve done more. I could’ve.

All I want is for Akamaru to get out of here alive. I curl around him reflexively, protecting him from the blade as Sakon goes to drive it down into my neck and -

“Oh no you don’t you conjoined bastard!” I hear a low, familiar voice growl - and suddenly Tsubasa fucking Noa, the most confusing woman I have ever met (my own mother included), is there. She has a sai in each hand and she drives them into each of the oto nin’s shoulders - pinning him to the tree.

“Careful!” I yelp, a reflex from growing up around so many canines. “He can enter your body and restructure your cells if you touch him!”

Gotta love moronic enemy monologues - never woulda guessed unless he told me.

Noa hears me clearly and nods once derisively before covering her hand with a layer of sapphire chakra and driving it straight into Sakon’s head.

“What the hell are you doing?” I bluster out, confused both by the brutality of the movement (Though not disgusted. The Inuzuka are known for ripping out enemy nin’s throats with their teeth, after all.) and the dismissal of my warning.

“Chakra protects me,” Noa grits out, sweat rolling down her neck.

Wait. Noa is a Tsubasa, and Hana said that the Tsubasa can take and reuse chakra from anything. Anyone.

“You’re draining him,” I realize aloud, and Noa spares a moment of concentration to shoot me a toothy grin. “Yeah I am. How ironic would it be if I took the chakra he tried to kill you with to heal you?”

I grin ferally, about to reply when I’m cut off by another - furious - voice.

“You will come to regret that.”

Shit, the twin!

---

NARA SHIKAMARU

Breaking a finger to get of Tayuya’s genjutsu was painful. It had to be, if I was going to break her hold on me. But losing my friends is worse.

Way worse.

I strain as Tayuya - in this sort of second step to her curse mark - begins to break my hold. I can’t have that - that isn’t an option - so I do what a Nara does best.

I think.
Her primary weapon seems to be her flute, which uses sound based attacks to control those gollums from before and adds to her proficiency in genjutsu. Very high proficiency. She must use that as her first choice when she doesn’t have the time or need for her brutes.

She’s got a kunai to my stomach and I’m only barely holding her back. I don’t have many options. I used most of my tags, and I’m in the range of affect anyway. Shuriken are useless at this close of range unless I get the perfect shot. I don’t use nor carry senbon and my only other physical weapons are my body and my kunai.

Kunai.

Kunai to my stomach. Pouch on my waist. Pouch on her waist.

I have an idea.

This is gonna suck.

I hold her for longer. A minute, two. Enough that she thinks that my hold is weakening.

Thank kami I put in the extra effort to train through this. I wouldn’t be able to -

‘Now!’ I mentally shout as Tayaya gives another push forward - meeting no resistance as I let the jutsu drop and her kunai drive itself all the way up to her fingers into my torso, her deathly strong grip temporarily locking her fingers to the handle.

But I’ve got both of my arms headed to two different kunai pouches, and as she moves her free hand to stop me from frisking a kunai from her belt I’ve got one of my own in my damaged hand and am running it up -

Blood splatters on my new flak jacket as the hilt of my kunai (a kunai that my father gave to me, gave to me when I graduated) comes to rest at the base of the girl’s (because she’s just a girl, a kid. Not much older than me) jaw, the blade lodged firmly into her brain.

Her grip goes slack.

I rip out my kunai, and the Oto nin goes tumbling - dragging her kunai with her out of my ribcage, pain lancing up my chest ...

I fall to my knees.

TSUBASA NOA

The moment that Ukon lunges into me, I push all of the chakra into my system into my seal - into my wings. If he thinks that he can use chakra against me in my own body? Well, he has another thing coming.

Sounds simple enough, but I felt like I was on fire.

“Kiba!” I get out through the pain, teeth clenched. “Kill me!”
“What?” He shouts, startled. “NO WAY!”

“I can heal myself!” I insist, feeling Ukon shifting inside me, in my cells. “I’m a medic! Now would you just put your kunai into my chest already?”

With a grimace, he does.

I black out as my heart stops.

---

**HYUUGA HIASHI**

“Up ahead,” I alert my squad, keeping calm outwardly, though all I wanted to do was sprint to find my nephew. “Akimichi Choji is at the location of the first flare. He seems partially healed although considerably emaciated.”

The Hokage’s first apprentice redies her medic kit even as we vault through the trees, her eyes ahead. “Good, I have the supplies for that. Choza-sama, will you be able to keep your head?”

I shift my focus, not needing to turn my head to survey the Ino-Shika-Cho trio of Clan Heads - each tense, although Shikaku and Choza the most so. The tank of an Akimichi only nods once, eyes on where I indicated his heir and son was ahead.

“It will not be a problem, Shizune-san,” He assures quietly. “I will not lose my head over this.”

‘No,’ I can’t help but think idly. ‘But someone else surely will.’

---

**TSUBASA NOA**

The delayed pulse of chakra I set to restart my heart - a jutsu I had read about but had never hoped never to use, much less on myself - does it’s job after what Kiba shakily informs me was roughly two minutes and ‘Too damn long for a healing jutsu, dammit Noa!’

I think he might have overreacted a bit.

When I start to recirculate my chakra again, lessening the pain in my head and body considerably, I am able to survey the damage.

Ukon had started to eject himself, but apparently started the jutsu just too late. He got the kunai and the escape he wanted, at least.

No great loss there.

“C’mere.” I command the both of them. “Kiba, place Akamaru to your side so I can get to your wounds. I’m chock full of these asshole’s chakra and I’m a firm believer in recycling.”

---

**YAMANAKA INOICHI**
I keep my head on a swivel as Shizune finishes what Noa started. Damn, that girl was getting better by the day. All of the Rookie 9 were, my daughter included.

I feel a pinch of a horrible feeling of relief at Ino not being sent on this suicide mission -

But then I stomp it down. Ino may have not have been, but Shikamaru and Choji sure were. And Choji was in bad shape - probably worse when Noa found him.

It’s strategy to take out the head to leave the body floundering. Shikaku knows that.

Those kids better be alright. Somehow, though, I doubt they will be.

“Shizune-san,” Hiashi calls out, and only years upon years working in T&I reading people gives me the experience to pick out the strain in his voice. “I have located Neji. He too is injured. Is Akimichi-san fit to move?”

Choza glances up sharply at the Hyuuga Head, but Shizune cuts off any rash parental remarks with an affirmation and a gesture for Choza to carry his sickly thin son.

And again we are on the move.

HATAKE KAKASHI

“What do you mean my students are being kidnapped ?”

“Sit down, Kakashi!” The Godaime bellows, clearly fed up with the entire situation - the situation I just found out about.

With great effort, I force myself into the stiff chair Tsunade was pointing violently at. I felt like a scolded child. My guilt rapidly evaporates once reality hits again.

Tsunade sighs, reaching for yet another sake bottle, and I have to grip my volume of Icha Icha Violence tight just to stop myself from grabbing, smashing, and running her through with it.

That would get me demoted. Or at least peeve her off enough that she’d keep me from going after my cute little chunin -

“Kakashi, your skills are not needed on this retrieval mission, we have the oldest Ino-Shika-Cho generation, Hyuuga Hiashi, Shizune, and the original squad all going after both Noa and Sasuke,” The Last Senju stresses, dropping the now-empty sake bottle into the waste bin unceremoniously. “Your next mission, an S-Rank from the land of Iron, has already been picked for you! You cannot go after your old team.”

My chakra flares accidentally in my anger, and I feel the ANBU guards shift warily. “They will always be my team - those who abandon their comrades are worse than trash! Those kids rely on me and I refuse to abandon them, S-Rank or not.”

“No!” She orders, chakra flowing like a tsunami. “I have risked too many good shinobi for this! Orochimaru wants the Sharingan. You are a possible target and emotionally compromised. You. Will. Stay. Put. Or so help me I will strap you down and throw you in T&I myself!”

I grit my teeth, preparing my chakra for a speedy escape when with an unexpected jolt, I look down
to see three senbon tightly clustered right in my right shoulder and -

I don’t even have time to curse Genma’s name before the sedative sets in and I lose myself to the darkness.

---

**NARA SHIKAMARU**

“Found him!” A voice yells and after a moment - and the feeling of Akamaru’s paws on my shoulder - I realize it was Kiba. “Noa! Over here!”

Noa? NOnononononono no - she should be safe! Back in the village like Tou-san said she would be! They were going to take her into custody, make sure it was really her in case she got grabbed too and -

“Oh Stag,” Noa’s strained voice completely derails my train of thought. “What happened to you?”

“Kunai,” I choke out, a weak smile on my lips. “You shouldn’t be here.”

“So they keep telling me,” Noa jokes, and that’s all okay. Because Noa doesn’t joke when it’s serious - not unless she knows there’s nothing to worry about.

For now.

Noa’s chakra creeps into my system, and I’m reminded that the mission isn’t over yet. That I still have four more men and a hostage to account for.

But for now - just for this second - I can relax in Noa’s presence here, to help. By my side.

Just like I want her to always be.

---

**SHIZUNE**

With Choji is slung across Choza’s shoulders and Neji tucked firmly in the crook of Hiashi’s neck, I feel my breathing to come a little easier.

That’s two genin stable and accounted for and two of the enemies dead and retrieved. That leaves only two more genin and a three chunin and a hostage. Might not sound like much, but between the Tsubasa and Uzumaki resilience and the strength of both the Inuzuka and the Kyuubi -

It could be worse. It so could be worse.

But we’re not out of the woods yet.

---

“There are signs of two battles,” Hiashi announces. “I see three more dead - Oto nin - but no signs of the genin or chunin. Inuzuka’s jacket is left abandoned on the ground.”
“Any sign of where they might’ve gone?” Shikaku asks in a mild tone I didn’t for a second believe was authentic.

“Due north.”

“Let’s go then.” The Jonin Commander grits out, “No sense in losing three Clan Heads in one sitting if we can help it.”

---

**SABAKU NO GAARA**

We arrive in the clearing just as Rock Lee avoids what looks to be a femur from impaling his carotid artery. He retreats swiftly, and as Kakuro brings Crow and Ant around to flank the nin I launch a tendril of sand to tie him down long enough for both Naruto and Temari to each land their own devastating Wind Jutsu.

“Who’s in the jug?” I hear Temari volley to the Leaf Nin as I bring my shield up to deflect a bombardment of phalanges.

“Sasuke!” Naruto shouts back, sending a swarm of clones in an attempt to breach the cage of bone surrounding the casket.

“The Uchiha?” Kankuro queries casually as he crushes our opponent’s arm in the chest of his puppet. “Thought he was supposed to be a big bad chunin.”

“He got ambushed!” Naruto defends, and we all fall into silence as we fight to down such an opponent.

Such an opponent, that even two Jinchuriki struggle to defeat them.

---

**SABAKU NO TEMARI**

The first thing I thought when I heard that the Uchiha is trapped in an urn is ‘Thank kami Noa isn’t the one stuck in there.’

But then I almost feel bad, because even though Noa is the one who reached out to my youngest brother - who called me a friend, treated me as if I wasn’t the Kazekage’s daughter, or the sister of the demon, but Temari - Konoha values teammates above most all else; Noa values the Uchiha.

So I settle. Decide to save Sasuke and protect Noa - who is, at least, safely back in Konoha.

That is, I thought she was until she burst into the clearing with Nara Shikamaru, an Inuzuka boy, and a tiny white puppy on her tail.

‘Holy shit she has wings.’

But also crap - because Noa is a target just as much as the Uchiha is and if that Konoha traitor Orochimaru is after her and crazy skeleton guy finds out she’s here -
I burst into the clearing and Kimimaro immediately locks onto me.

“YOU -” He bellows, his exposed ribs vibrating with the force of it. “You are my replacement!”

“Replacement …? As Orochimaru’s new body?” Ruto chokes out, disgust and anger clouding his features. “Hell no!”

“You’re telling me!” I mutter forcefully before raising my voice to yell at my teammate, “What’s this guy’s deal? Bones?”

“You!” He hollers back, sending another swarm of clones to saw away at the literal rib cage surrounding the casket Sasuke’s chakra was coming from. “He can regrow and remove them at will - and they’re as dense and strong as steel, maybe even stronger. Plus a healing factor.”

I give an affirmative ‘got it!’ and turn to fill Kiba in, giving Shikamaru space to pull his thoughts together, his fingers firmly locked in his thinking pose.

In the end, the plan is taken out of Shika’s hands as Gaara sighs longsufferingly before turning the ground beneath our feet into a swirling desert of sand - an impressive feat, even for a Jinchuriki.

The moment I realized what was happening, I shouted to the others to scale the highest trees they could while I grabbed Shikamaru in a fireman’s carry - wings carrying us high into the sky.

“Remind me never to make him angry.” Shikamaru muttered close to my ear, and I have to laugh as we settle down on the now static sand.

“Don’t worry, I don’t think a Nara can actually be that dumb,” I assure him dryly.

I set him down gently, allowing him time to readjust his chakra -

Just in time for a spear made of pure bone to hurtle out of the ground and skewer me through the back, the tip of the bone protruding right above my heart.

The earth begins to shake - chakra spiking in the gut lurching, familiar way that a bijuu decimates - and immediately Hiashi and Choza fall back with their injured children as Inoichi, Shizune and I Shushin straight toward the blast.

We arrive in the sand filled clearing in time to see the Kazekage’s oldest son crush a foreign nin inside his puppets -

Just before he was able to land a killing blow on Noa.

A killing blow on -

I have to stop myself from thinking.
Shizune is at the girl’s side in an instant, and I turn away from the scene to watch as the Ichibi Jinchuuriki extricate a round, sealed tub from the sea of sand he created. A glance at Inoichi only confirms it.

“Is he alive in there?” I ask, examining the seals on the tub, silently thankful that Jiraiya was actually around these days.

“Hard to tell for sure,” Inoichi confesses, eyes closed. “I’m a good sensor, but these seals are making it difficult. If he’s dead, it was recent - there’s still evidence of his chakra.”

“That’s not a good answer,” I comment mildly.

“Best one you’re going to get.” The Yamanaka Clan Head responds blithely.

SENJU TSUNADE

The moment that the rescue party returns I’m barking out orders.

“I want this entire level secure - no one who isn’t cleared or on duty gets out. Get Choji and Neji into surgery and check Kiba and Shikamaru over! Someone go get Inuzuka Hana! Hiashi, go get Jiraiya ASAP - he should be perving by the baths at this time of day - and Inochi go get Gai before he flips. Move Noa into room 409 and Naruto, guard that box!”

The hospital becomes a flurry of movement around me, but I beline for 409 to check on my stupid, idiotic, self-sacrificing apprentice.
THE PARTING

Chapter Summary

"The Hokage is holding a meeting. You need to be there."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Underlined - English

‘Italicised’ - Thoughts

In Text Bolded - Tailed Beast

YAMANAKA INO

Shikamaru hasn’t moved an inch from the hallway.

The rescue team was brought in, what? Five hours ago? Six? They fixed him right up - barely anything left to heal - but right away he was out of his bed and outside the OR, waiting.

I joined him three hours ago, and since then Kiba has swung by before going to check on his dog. Neji is in the ICU … Sasuke-kun’s being looked at by Jiraiya and Shizune …

And Choji and Noa still haven’t come out of surgery.

The silence is tense - I feel like I’m suffocating. That girl from Suna - the Kazekage’s daughter, Temari? - is waiting here. She makes a snippy comment at me, something about how I need more emotional training, but it barely even registers.

Choji and Noa -

Choji isn’t weak, I know that. But he doesn’t go out of his way to pick a fight or train but Noa. She’s a chunin. She has a Kekkei Genkai and she -

I should’ve gone with them! I should’ve helped - I should’ve trained more and worked harder and been there.

I’ll have to be there next time. I will be there next time.

JIRAIYA

The moment Shizune’s hands light green on Sasuke’s forehead he bolts upright.

She immediately has him back on the table (using quite a bit of chakra enhanced strength to do so) as her diagnostic jutsu ran through his system, ignoring his babble of sputtering questions.
“Sasuke,” I say, dragging his attention to me and off Shizune. “You’re fine. You’re back in Konoha. You’re safe.”

“Noa!” He chokes out, eyes wide and unseeing. “If they’re after me, they’ll go after her too-!”

“She’s fine,” Shizune soothes. “Orochimaru never got his hands on her - no one from Sound did.”

(I deem it prudent not to mention she’s been in surgery for the last five hours.)

“Good,” the chunin coughs out. “Good.”

I give Shizune a nod, and with a pulse of chakra the Last Uchiha becomes insensate.

HATAKE KAKASHI

Nausea rolls through my stomach as consciousness returns sluggishly. Instinctively I begin to churn chakra to burn the last of the drugs I was obviously under the influence of.

Habit keeps me still and my breathing steady as I clear my system an observe my surroundings. Surprisingly I’m not in a bed but rather a chair - a rather comfy one at that. My wrists are strapped to the armrests and they put a low belt across my legs, but my head is loose and hanging low and my legs are completely unrestrained. A twinge in my arm tells me I’ve got an IV in my arm, but it’s obviously on it’s last dregs if I am aware at all.

I sit there for another quarter of an hour as I burn the last of the drugs. Just as I feel the last of the wool in my head clear the door slides open -

“Kakashi-sensei? They said the drugs would’ve worn off by now.”

Relieved to give up the farce, I open my eye and look up at my sensei’s son, relieved that he was up and walking.

(I refuse to think about how the Kyuubi could save him from just about anything and that he or his teammates could’ve been far more injured but I couldn’t do anything because I was strapped to a chair -)

“Naruto,” I greet, not bothering to keep the relief out of my voice. “How’re the others?”

The weight on my heart and my shoulders lifts at the sight of Naruto’s sunny and full smile - I let myself relax into the chair for the first time since I’ve woken up. Somehow even without me it all worked out.

“Noa coming after us was a stroke of good luck!” He exclaims with true relief. “Choji, Neji, Kiba, Akamaru, and Shikamaru would’ve all been in trouble if she hadn’t! But she did so it’s fine! We got Sasuke back and he was trapped in this weird urn thing but Ero-sennin got him out and Shizune fixed him right up. Gaara and his siblings helped us out, so even though we fought this guy with a really weird bloodline limit it worked out! I mean he could -”

And so I relax back and listen to my cute little student jabber on about how he saved his teammates.

‘Minato-sensei, Kushina-nee,’ I think - my smile hid behind my mask. ‘You would be proud of
“your son.’

“Naruto,” I interrupt him - affecting my voice to be as dry as Suna air. “Perhaps you would untie me?”

(I have to stomp down laughter at the guilty look on Naruto’s face.)

---

**JIRAIYA**

I lurk in the doorway of the hospital room, taking in the scene. Kakashi is passed out next to Sasuke’s bed while Naruto is splayed across the foot of Noa’s - both of the occupants dead to the world with the glorious aid of sedatives.

Security is on high alert, and the Hime eventually just gave in and let the entirety of Team 7 stay in one room - for ease of guarding and to prevent most of the whining. I hold back a snort at the memory of a swarm of Naruto’s bothering Tsunade in waves until she gave it.

(I’d have to use Naruto to convince the Hime in the future….)

Still can’t get over that Tsunade had to sedate Kakashi just to stop him from running after his kids. Talk about overprotective dad. Big brother. Teacher. Whatever.

Tiptoeing quietly around the chunin, I make it over to Kakashi and nudge him slightly - ready to deflect any wayward attacks prompted by old battle instincts. (Scaring jounin is just asking for a kunai through the gut, really.)

“Kakashi,” I call out lowly, skillfully disarming him as he comes at me with a kunai. “The Hokage is holding a meeting. You need to be there.”

---

**HATAKE KAKASHI**

Rubbing the last of the sleep out of my eye, I Shushin after Jiraiya straight into the Hokage’s office and take in the gathering of people.

Shikaku is leaning up against a bookshelf, casually flicking through what looks to be a stack of mission reports. Beside him, Shizune is gazing imperviously at Gai - unaffected by the sheer number of squats the Youthful jounin was subjecting himself to. ANBU Cat - who I fondly recognized as Tenzo - is looking at the same jounin with surprisingly less aplomb, if his occasional twitch was anything to go by. And of course, the Godaime herself is sat in her regal chair with an intimidating pile of paperwork on either side of her, an unopened sake bottle rolling between her hands.

“My Rival!” Gai exclaims as soon as we enter, “How Youthful to see you here at this time!”

“About time you got here, brat,” Tsunade grumbles, saving me from needing to reply. “This is important.”

Her tone pulls me up short, and I unconsciously straighten my posture as I sidle up between Tenzo and Gai. I narrow my visible eye at the assembled shinobi, “Important how?”
“Important because of your team,” Shikaku replies for the room, snapping his file shut audibly. “Orochimaru’s latest actions have proven that he is willing and able to invade the village just to get to Sasuke and Noa.”

“And Naruto is in just as much danger as they are,” Jiraiya chips in and I feel my blood run cold. “That organization - the Akatsuki? They’re hunting Jinchuriki. Team 7 is a target - especially all together. Orochimaru used to be a member of the Akatsuki and there’s no telling what would happen if they decided to work together towards a common goal.”

My mind is racing. Jiraiya’s right: with my bingo book entry, Sasuke’s eyes, Noa’s reputation and bloodline, and Naruto’s status we would be ideal targets that would draw in anyone desperate or motivated enough. We wouldn’t be able to run missions as a team until this all magically solved itself.

“What are you suggesting?” I ask when I find my voice, locking eyes with the Last Senju. “You wouldn’t have called me - or this many people - here unless you had a solution. Even a hairbrained one.”

“We split you up until you can all take care of yourselves.”

I stop myself from sputtering, trying in vain to argue how stupid an idea that was but Tsunade cuts me off.

“We aren’t just going to make new teams - they’d be in just as much danger if not more if we did that. We’re going full division,” She clarifies, golden eyes as warm as ice, showing the finality of her decision. “Jiraiya is taking Naruto out of village. They’d be further developing his spy network while training Naruto in fuinjutsu and ninjutsu on top of controlling his bijuu if possible. Sasuke has already submitted his application into ANBU and until he is strong enough to hold his own he’ll go fully dark. And Noa will stay here with me, full ANBU security rotations and myself to defend her, working in the hospital to develop her skill and in village with her Kekkei Genkai and taijutsu.

“You - Gai and Kakashi - have some sway in this. Gai, Noa values your opinion and even calls you Nii-chan - she’s less likely to put up a fight if you’re by her side on this. And Kakashi, with all of Team 7 orphans - even if they are also clan heads - you technically hold position over big decisions like this as their jounin-sensei.”

I swallow mechanically, “You want us to tell them that we’re splitting them up? Maybe permanently?”

“Yes.”

“For how long?” Gai asks, Youthfulness subdued by the gravity of the situation.

“I’d recommend six years,” Shikaku cuts in, and I whip around to fix him with a glare before he elaborates. “Don’t give me that Kakashi. Long as that may be, that’s how long advanced medical and fuuinjutsu training takes. Even long ANBU stints take up to ten years, so it could be longer.”

I grit my teeth behind the mask, and turn to Tenzo. “You’re going to be his captain?” I ask, and at the nod I grin a bit ferally. “Well I’m back in the service, so you can fight me for him.”

They’s a jolt of surprise from my cute kouhai, but it is quickly hidden, “It will be good to have you back, Senpai.”

“I’ll teach the kid to be a Sage while I’m at it,” Jiraiya cuts in with a non sequitur, bringing
previously unfound levity. “That way at the very least Naruto will be able to save the rest of their asses when the time is up.”

Tsunade picks up on his mood and scoffs, uncorking her sake. “As if. Gai and I will run Noa into the ground so she can save her boy’s sorry selves. You can’t top that.”

“Please,” I laugh, finally feeling the tension leaving my body, if only for now. “Sasuke will have you all beat.”

UCHIHA SASUKE

The moment Kakashi and Gai finish getting the words out about the Hokage’s decision, I’ve got Noa and Naruto’s shoulders in each hand and am Sushining us away as fast as I can - not even caring about startling my teammates.

Six years?

When I’ve finished our mad dash we’re through the gates and in the tower of the Forest of Death - such a danger no longer a problem for chunin of our caliber. “Are we going to let them do this?” I ask - voice rough. “Can we let them? Can we stop them?”

Noa flops back onto the rough concrete, “I dunno. I don’t think so.”

“And which questions did those answers go to?” Naruto jokes weakly, but it isn’t funny.

None of this is funny.

Noa pushes herself up tiredly and with a flick of her wrist has a pile of dominos on the dirty floor, pulling twelve out for herself while pushing another twelve towards both me and Naruto.

As we begin a rather cross game of Chicken Foot, we all stew in silence. Considering, debating. Trying to make a choice.

“19.” Noa finally speaks, trying out the word. “When we come back from this, we’ll be 19.”

“I don’t want to miss all that.”

Naruto’s voice is small, but I can’t help but feel the same. We all change the most in these coming years, would we want to miss all of that. For the chance of growing stronger?

No. We’d definitely grow stronger.

“We should,” Noa utters, and I feel the bottom of my stomach drop. “We should, because they won’t give us a choice. And because Sage Mode and fuinjutsu will get Ruto closer to being Hokage. Because ANBU is Sasuke’s dream, and a six year stint will set you up for becoming commander. Because learning extensively from the past Head Medic will line me right up with becoming Head myself.”

I swallow, and I can feel the lull lengthening. “If we do this, we do it for us. We do it so when we come back we can be a team again. So that when Orochimaru or the Akatsuki comes after us we’re ready.”

Naruto grins at us - game forgotten - and sticks out his hand. Noa stacks hers over his, and I place
mine on top.

“Six years,” Noa affirms - eyes wet and bearing a smile with maybe a few too many teeth. “Six years and then Squad 7 takes the Nations by storm.”

SENJU TSUNADE

I stand with Jiraiya as Team 7 loses its first member.

Naruto is a wreck, and I know that deep down the rest are no better - but he’s the first to go. Six years is a long time when shinobi can die in an instant.

I turn to my old teammate, “You’ll take care of him, right?”

“Don’t even have to ask, Hime.” Jiraiya laughs, leaning out of the way at my swipe at the nickname. He sober quickly, “And her?”

“She’ll be fine.” I assure, frowning at the Last Uchiha and Hatake. “It’s those two I’m worried about.”

UCHIHA SASUKE

The Uchiha district is quiet.

It hasn’t been this quiet since Noa and Naruto moved in next door. Not since Gai would break in for Noa’s early morning training and Naruto would flee to the old buildings, his prank victims in hot pursuit.

But Noa was moved effective immediately to Hokage residence to be under guard the moment Naruto was dragged out of the village by Jiraiya. I’m the only one left.

At some point Noa - with the aid of Naruto’s Clones - had finally snapped and gathered all of the assets of the Uchiha compound into one house, the one beside mine (on the unoccupied side). I hadn’t gone in, insisting that I didn’t want the reminder of the dead - but Noa had just shrugged and passed me a small scroll.

“Don’t do it till you’re ready,” She had said. “But when you are, here’s the list of everything.”

I have the same scroll in my hands now, and with unsteady fingers I pry open the edge and begin to search for anything that I would need for when I go dark. The list seems straightforward. Most was sold off, the beds, furniture, clothes, rugs, linens … the list was mostly weapons and books and scro-

Summoning scroll?

I’m up on my feet and into the ghost house before I can psych myself out.

‘The Uchiha had a summoning scroll?’
Going dark in ANBU is sudden. It has to be. No teary goodbyes. No dramatic farwells. Only waking up to find that someone you care about has disappeared into the night.

But for me it’s not one person - it’s two. I’ve lost two brothers to the shadows that guard me. The shadows that kill. The shadows that die.

I never thought I’d hate ANBU. I was wrong.

‘Six years, Noa.’ I tell myself. ‘You can do six years.’

FIN

Continued in I Always Knew This Was Coming

Rewritten as of 8/31/19

Chapter End Notes

Heyo! Well wasn't this a whirlwind!

Six years is a longer time skip than I bet most of you were expecting - but don't worry! I have it planned out! The next installment of this series, which as of now I haven't come up with a name for (suggestions would be appreciated) will be coming out once I have the chance - but chaos always preludes spring break, so no promises for speed!

Lots of Love, thank you all for sticking with me and Noa for so long!
- Milo Of The Key
REWRITE NOTICE

Chapter Summary

About the rewrite.

Hiya. Not dead, which is a nice change of events.

I have rewritten. All the chapters have been updated of INRHSKW and soon IAKTWC will be as well.

I know it’s been a while. Bare with me, real life is a thing.

- Milo Of The Key

End Notes

Thank you all so much for reading so far into my humble story! I own no one but Noa - and even her I based off someone in real life.

If any of you have any advise, thoughts, or opinions on what I should or should not do with this story - Please! Comment down below. I will respond to all questions you have.

Thank you again, and I hope each day is a day worth living.

With love,
--Milo Of the Key

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!