Use a tissue when you wipe your nose

**Summary**

Kakashi comes down with a cold seven(ish?) days after he passes his first genin team. He knew children were a bad idea but he didn't think it would change anything this fast.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

This, thought Kakashi miserably, was why he stayed away from children, places that had children, and hospitals. This sucked. And he’d only been around the brats the bare minimum of, like, a week tops. One fucking week and this happened. What the hell was his life coming to Taken out by a cold.

He momentarily wondered if the Kyuubi canceled the effects of vaccinations. Or if Naruto had ever been vaccinated in his entire life. The tiny filthy orange rat probably didn’t even know what germs were. This was definitely his fault. Or Sasuke. Kakashi was pretty sure that no one had bothered to actually enforce any sort of rules on that kid. He was probably worse then Naruto now. Maybe. At least even in terms of being a disgusting preteen. Either way it wasn’t Sakura carrying the disease that caused this bullshit, she cared far too much about her appearance to avoid personal hygiene. That was why she was Kakashi’s favorite little student of all of a week.

Lying in his tiny apartment in his bed, he eyed the alarm clock. He was later than intended even, and he wasn’t really sure actually getting up and going through the effort of appearing in front of a couple of ungrateful genin would be worth it. Too fucking bad Gai hadn’t shown up to issue a challenge that morning. Kakashi could have distracted him with unsupervised youths in need of guidance or some bullshit like that. Whatever, eventually the kids would leave or find something to do. It's not like Kakashi was about to send out a messenger to tell… oh actually that was exactly what he could do. The cold was definitely messing with him now.

“Hey. Hey Pakkun. Pakkun get up.”

The beautiful pug Pakkun was happily snoring somewhere by Kakashi’s feet. And elected to ignore his master by rolling over and snuggling in. Kakashi’s bidding could wait another hour. Or month.

Ill with diseases spread by dirty preteens, Kakashi kicked Pakkun (gently!) in the side. It wasn’t a great move because Pakkun immediately turned the saddest eyes on Kakashi who was a weak, weak man. He was also a ninja and knew manipulation when he saw it... even if he caved anyways. Oh well, it could wait an hour or two, he guessed.

“Pakkun you gotta take care of the- the brats.”

“Go back to sleep, fuck head.”

And that, figured Kakashi, was that.

--

That was actually the beginning of the largest clusterfuck to hit Konoha since the Uchiha and the Senju had thrown a rager after the founding of the village.

--

On a bridge, impatiently waiting, were the filthy preteens themselves. Kakashi was later then usual,
and even though they had all shown up late (team 7 was technically assigned a 6am meet time),
expecting their sensei to arrive sometime around 10, they were pretty sure this wasn’t the standard
Kakashi lateness. Well Sakura was pretty sure at least. Naruto was sitting in a heap snoring to her left
and a little further down the bridge Sasuke was staring at the water below them.

On one level, Sakura thought he looked dashing gazing off into the distance like that. On a deeper
more private level, she wondered if he was asleep with his eyes open and if he had somehow
mastered standing asleep like a horse.

Sakura quickly looked away before she snorted at the thought. She didn’t really want to test the
patience of an annoyed Uchiha right now before their sensei had even shown up.

Leaning back against the railing, Sakura idly day dreamed about what could be keeping the jounin.
Maybe he was preparing to teach them something! Or a mission! Maybe Kakashi-sensei had been
called away on a dangerous mission so quickly he couldn’t even send word to his precious young
genin squad! That was a far better reason than the last fifteen he’d given to explain away his
tardiness.

Hours crawled by even slower and Sakura was absolutely positive now, through covert sneaky
glances, that Sasuke was part horse and could stand upright and sleep at the same time. It would
explain a few things.

Eventually Sakura had taken to sitting on the railing instead of leaning back against it. Her chin was
propped up on her hands, elbows resting on her thigh as she slumped over. It was almost noon and
Sakura would give it 10 more minutes before either Naruto, who was slowly waking up, or Sasuke
left.

Her money was on Sasuke.

If that had been an actual bet with the universe she would have lost.

Naruto rolling up onto his feet stretched his hands to the sky groaning. The noise startled Sasuke
who flinched then glowered ferociously at an unaware Naruto.

“Alright, I’m outa here.” And with that rather simple declaration Naruto turned to leave.

“Yo.”

Sakura, closest to the sudden arrival, shrieked and jerked backwards, tumbling head over heals off
the railing and into the water below. She came up screaming for murder even louder then Naruto
who was howling blindly about lateness. Even Sasuke was getting in on the yelling this time.

As Sakura scrambled back to dry land she realized that the noise level had dropped significantly.
Faster then it should have. Suspicious she palmed a kunai, unsure what she could actually do in the
face of sudden danger but unwilling to go in without a blade. Whatever could make Naruto quiet
was obviously something dangerous. (She also had an entire look to avenge from that sudden drop
into the water.)

Back on the bridge Naruto and Sasuke gaped at the arrival. Completely floored by the dog in a
headband holding up a paw in a mockery of a peace sign. Sakura who appeared behind them
plotting murder for her ruined look and mutilated honor (that shriek, the fall – Sasuke had seen all of
it) paused at her frozen teammates to actually absorb was she was seeing.

Pakkun grinned a mean doggy grin and set his paw down. He smugly thought that he was already
doing a better job than Kakashi was at this whole teaching thing. Sharpening their senses and all that
by sudden appearances, expect the unexpected, situational awareness and all that jazz.

“Alright kids, listen up. Kakashi’s busy so I’m in charge. You can call me Pakkun-sama or Pakkun-sensei. Sir also works.”

None of the kids look very enthused and the pink one was still holding a knife (poorly, Pakkun could do better and he didn’t even have thumbs).

“Holy shit that dogs talking.”

This was going to be fun.

Chapter End Notes

HEYYYYYYYYYY yeah i haven't worked on Restitution for like. a year or something. and I'm sorry there will be a chapter eventually for that. In the meantime I'm here scratch a particular itch that wont leave me alone. I have no idea what im even doing wading into this fandom tbh but Sakura has been one of my favorite characters of fiction since i was a child and even though canon had regularly let me down with her i fucking love reading sakura-centric fics. that said. this fic is purely for my enjoyment. i dont know how it will appeal to the people reading it and i dont know if anyone will even read it. i hope somewhere out there it scratches an itch for someone else. if not thats ok. this fic will be un-beta'd since i dont think my usual guy (she's my hero and i love her but she has standards) would read a naruto fic for me lol but if you seen any glaring issues call them out and i will fix them. bare with me guys this is a au and basically I'm not playing by the rules its crack and semi serious and it doesnt know when to or when not to take itself seriously but I'm gonna have a lot of fun writing this and i hope if you read it you have fun too :D
Chapter 2

Sakura dreamed about eating roasted pug that night. Across the village her teammates’ subconscious thoughts weren’t better off.

Earlier in the day, after Pakkun introduced himself and the genin managed to overcome their shock at finding out some dogs could talk, they’d been hustled to the training grounds. Well, Sasuke had demanded that Pakkun prove he was sent by Kakashi and the dog had dryly asked if Sasuke could prove that he wasn’t. That had set Naruto off laughing at Sasuke being burned by a mutt, which Sakura instinctively shoved him for, hissing for Naruto to shut up (Naruto leapt away from her hand with a shriek of protest as Sakura had forgotten about her kunai – not that she actually did any damage). Anyways Sasuke did have a point. So did Pakkun.

In the end they decided that with Kakashi still missing they had nothing better to do and followed the dog.

“Oi. Doggy. What exactly are we doing - missions? Training? Missions and training?!” Naruto was never one for tact… even though he was just the fastest to asking the pressing question now that all three of them had proven to be morons who followed the first person to tell them their sensei sent them.

“It’s Pakkun-sama to you. And just training. I don’t have the authorization to lead human genin on missions right now.” Pakkun glanced over his shoulder and up at the preteens following him as he spoke. What the hell had Kakashi been working on with these kids anyways? Did he have a training plan yet? Was training children like training puppies? Positive encouragement and occasional treats for things especially well done? Probably. If not, Pakkun would figure something else out.

Luckily training ground 3 was close by and they made it without any mishaps. Personally Pakkun didn’t see what Kakashi had been complaining about the other day. For the most part these kids seemed fairly standard. A little easy to rile up but they also calmed down fairly quickly. Not the smartest bunch either, which made things easier.

“Right – dump your shit over there and stretch out. We’re going for a run to start things off. And tell me what Kakashi’s been working on.” The kids all groaned but moved to obey, the pink one finally owning up that Kakashi hasn’t been doing shit with them.

Sakura’s actual phrasing was more along the lines of “Pakkun-sensei, it’s only been a week, we’ve just been doing d-rank missions and a few spars….”

Pakkun, overseeing the team stretch, found them severely lacking. Naruto basically reached for the sky then shook his legs all over the place. Sakura went through the basic catalog from the academy, which was, at best, a supplementary program designed for clan-based students who received a more intense stretching regime at home. Sasuke, as well, stretched the basic academy catalog, though he added a few extra poses for effect. Sakura took notice of that to her own distraction and delight. Naruto basically ignored everything Sasuke was doing to prove a point he’d forgotten to share with the team.

Deeming them ready enough Pakkun spoke up, “As a group we are going to the top of the Hokage Monument. First one there gets a prize.”

As one, the three 12-year-olds whipped their heads in the direction of the mountain then back to the dog as if wondering if he had lost his mind. (It was only a few kilometers from their current position...
and only if they passed through a small portion of the orphan slums.) Then hell broke loose as they all began protesting over one another.

“That’s so far! How would be make that run?”

“You want us to do what, doggy? That’s dumb! Why not something cool like a justu!”

“Shut up idiot,” Sasuke’s protest was basically just a mental complaint that this wasn’t real training and despair over listening to a dog.

Pakkun was not entirely expecting the protest and stared at the kids for a second then copied their earlier glance at the monument and back. “That’s…. Eventually you’re going to be expected to run across entire countries. Get up and start running before I take a bite out of you!”

Mid-sentence, Pakkun more or less decided that violent encouragement was needed and growled at the children before leaping (slowly even) at the orange one. Naruto, shrieking, stumbled away from the suddenly scary dog and promptly decided that running to the monument was the better part of valor and took off.

Sasuke who wasn’t about to not be first to the monument followed a second later, catching up to Naruto’s messy stride and overtaking him in their dash.

Sakura’s faint “wait for-“ died on her breath as she scrambled after her teammates.

Pakkun followed easily behind Sakura, snapping at her heels before calling up for her to “catch up to your team, kid!”

Ahead of her Naruto and Sasuke left the training grounds and dashed in a more or less straight line towards the monument. Which took them through a fairly crowded market in the orphan slums (officially known as the Sapling District a 6 block residential area, mostly populated by refugees, the children of refugees, lower income civilians, and orphaned ninja). Tents and lean-to and carts and street venders were larger and easier to avoid obstacles, the crowd being a solid mix of ninja and civilian was a little harder to predict.

While Sasuke and Naruto charged into the urban jungle without hesitation, Sakura slowed her pace and scampered up a near by fire escape to the roof of a row of townhouses. It would take her nearly half a block before she would be forced to find an alternative route.

Still at Sakura’s heels, Pakkun asked, “Did you forget about staying with your team?”

“NO! They – Forgot – ME!” already panting Sakura ran on over the flat roofs. At then end of the row she managed the leap from the roof to a balcony on apartment building. It was more difficult than the obstacle courses at the Academy. Pausing to catch her breath she glanced at the pug who seemed to be considering something.

“Sakura get back to the ground and keep going. I’m going to fetch your team.” Sakura huffed that the dog made a dog pun and made short work of climbing down the side of the building a balcony at a time.

Meanwhile Sasuke and Naruto had been stopped by a chunin on guard rotation who wrote them each a citation for disturbing the peace, complete with a court date for public shaming (they would be forced to watch a three-hour educational video on why disturbing the peace of a public market was highly discouraged, with heavily implied dialog that they failed at being sneaky ninja for being caught and that’s really why they are forced to watch this movie).
As soon as the chunin let them go the boys began their wild dash again, slightly more aware of their surroundings than before. That didn’t stop them from tripping over each other when Pakkun appeared in their path.

“You forgot something kids,” Pakkun growled at the genin. Naruto and Sasuke eyed each other equally confused before Naruto suddenly gasped.

“Sakura! Where is she - did you eat her?!?”

“She was probably too slow to keep up dumbass,” Sasuke said to cover up the fact he completely forgot they were supposed to run as a team.

“Hey, shaddup, asshole, at least I remembered her!” (Never mind that Naruto also forgot about her.) Pakkun rolled his doggy eyes and growled low at the preteens, “Find her or be punished!” and leapt at them (again, slowly, but he really would bite them this time) to get them moving. For all their efforts Sasuke got a chomp on his left ankle and Naruto a bite to the calf.

Naruto practically screeched out “how are we suppose to find her?” while Sasuke snarled and threw a kunai at the dog. The chunin guard from earlier looked in his direction and started over to write another citation for the prohibited use of weapons in a civilian marketplace (complete with an entirely different educational video on the merits of not getting caught using knives in public). Sasuke saw her coming and grabbed Naruto and took off faster then before. The chunnin watched them go then wrote down the citation with the full intention of mailing it anyways as the ninken were always very helpful in providing the names of commanding officers and squad assignments.

--

Meanwhile, Sakura had continued on her way to the monument. She had slowed to a steady jog through the busier crowds and had found a few emptier side roads to make the run a little easier. By the time she got to the base of the mountain she was drenched in sweat and her teammates nowhere to be found. Probably for the best, she didn’t want Sasuke to see her like this.

She wondered if she was supposes to climb to the top or not, and if there was a better way than the thousands of zigzagging stairs.

“Saku - RAAAAAAA! RUN!!!!”

Abruptly Naruto and Sasuke zoomed past her with the former grabbing her wrist and nearly jerking her off her feet as he dragged her up the stairs. Behind her it sounded like an entire pack of dogs was on the hunt baying at found prey. A risky glance over her shoulder told her that was exactly the case… with Pakkun was leading the charge. She tripped over one of the stairs, ripping her wrist free of Naruto’s death grip to catch her fall on the stairs in front of her, scraping her palm open.

Suddenly Sasuke was in front of her grabbing her arm and pulling her upright while yelling at Naruto to grab her other arm. She squawked as she was practically lifted off her feet by her teammates as they carried her up a few stairs. Behind them the barking got even louder and even more frightening.

The largest of the dogs was suddenly in front of them blocking the path and Pakkun was sitting on top of of the other dog’s head. (Sakura vaguely noted that neither Sasuke or Naruto looked surprised.
by a dog riding another dog and wondered what the hell they had gotten up to in the last hour.)

“Run as a group or don’t run at all,” Pakkun barked, which meant something to the boys as they set Sakura back on her own two feet and released her arms. She was pretty sure there would be bruising in the shape of fingers by tomorrow where Sasuke had grabbed her. She could feel the hot breath of the dogs at her back and her teammates pressing close on either side. The boys looked mutinous and frightened at the same time. Pakkun and the large dog weren’t doing anything to stop them from running and her brief respite at the bottom of the stairs had allowed her to get her second wind. Making eye contact with the pug she nodded in understanding and started up the stairs, under her own power this time. The two dogs moved out of her direct path and, though she didn’t look back, she was sure the boys had edged past the dogs before catching up to her.

The barking started up again and the boys quickly overtook her pace. A particularly ferocious snarl had both boys slowing down to match pace with their slower teammate. By the top, Sakura’s legs were shaking and she was vaguely ashamed that both her teammates seemed ready to continue as if the run had only winded them and not wiped their stamina like it had for her.

She hadn’t really noticed as they climbed that the barking had calmed down or how the oppressive fear of teeth and claws and hunters at her back had faded until it was completely gone and the dogs, eight of them she realized, spread out around the genin panting happily. One of them was wearing sunglasses.

“That was terrible. Sakura, meet the pack. Your teammates met them earlier. Also, everyone gets a prize for making it to the top. Pick a dog and start doing some ear rubs.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The day after team 7 met Pakkun and ran across the village and back to training ground 3 (after ear rubs), they met up for the first time in days actually on time, at 6 in the morning. Pakkun and the horde of dogs, about which none of the kids managed to ask, sent the genin on a run to the monument and around again. The children, too tired to really complain, wondered what happened to their elusive teacher. They still listened to the dog though. (Because teeth.)

Kakashi, in his little apartment, tried to remember what day it was and where his dogs went before downing some cold meds and going back to sleep.

The preteens spent the day running around the village being chased by dogs or doing the chasing. (Sakura guessed the dogs were summons, Naruto figured they were talking pets that Kakashi needed an excuse to have, and Sasuke only noted they were better at this whole team thing than Kakashi had been. Sakura and Naruto agreed with that, even if Pakkun made them run and run and run.)

While none of the members of team 7 knew this at the time, they were supposed to be assigned their first C-rank mission that day. Because Kakashi was currently indisposed and the genin were under the supervision of a dog, the mission desk marked the team for temporary inactivity and the previously selected mission was passed to the chunin corps for re-assignment. (A team of chunin for a c-rank escort mission usually cost the same as one jounin and the three genin to tag along for training.)

Later that day, after the chunin and genin corps received their assignments, a team of three (two recent promotions and an older shinobi slowly retiring down the ranks) left through the village gates to escort the bridge builder back to the Land of Waves roughly the same time the genin of team 7 made it to the top of the Hokage Monument for the third time in as many hours.

The farther the chunin team got from the village the more certain they were that something on this mission wasn’t as it seemed. Typically escort missions of this caliber were handled by young genin teams and their jounin-sensei and if there wasn’t one available, it would be handed off to the corps to deal with. This one was especially low rank and at worst, the team captain assumed, they might face an especially brave rabbit or something equally ridiculous. But as they traveled farther from the Hidden Village, the jumpier their client, a drunk who berated the team every step of the way, became.

In Konoha Kakashi still hadn’t woken up from his cold medicine-induced snooze fest.

Nearing midnight one of the chunin (a younger, recent promotion) stumbled towards the village gates before, to the alarm of the night guard, collapsing. No one was sure how she had made it all the way back to the Village proper without encountering any of the patrols and that was even more alarming than a young woman bloody and dying. As the guard called for back up, a general alert went out to tighten up security and find the hole one of their own had fallen through.

Sasuke in his large and empty apartment, far from the gates, stared up at the ceiling unable to sleep.

It took hours of surgery (she had lacerations to the lower abdomen, a stab wound through her left shoulder, and a fairly large chunk of muscle had been torn away from her lower right leg on top of severe chakra exhaustion and blood loss) before she was stable enough to be moved to a room.
Naruto rolled off his bed and thumped to the ground, never waking for a moment. His neighbor did, though, and sent another complaint to the building’s super about that damn brat upstairs making a racket in the middle of the night.

The chunin, officially identified as Fujita Mai, had been sent out earlier with teammates Nomura Sano and Yoshida Maemi (both MIA) was awoken by the corps commander for a debriefing. Mai warbled out that her team was dead, the client was dead, and that someone by the name of Gato had commissioned the strike. The chunin commander patted Mai’s shoulder and told her to go back to sleep and that they would alert the Hokage to the situation.

Sakura woke up to shower and make breakfast for herself, sparing plenty of time to make her way to the bridge to begin running again with the boys, the pack at their heels.

By 0600 hours, the Hokage had sent out messengers and assembled a team of jounin: Maito Gai (training with his genin team), Hatake Kakashi (asleep in his apartment - nearly stabbed the messenger), and Shiranui Genma (also asleep - did not try to stab the messenger). The team was to deal with the sudden threat that had killed two chunin of the leaf and acquire monetary reparations for assists lost in the line of duty on assignment commissioned under false pretense. Basically, Kakashi summarized to himself as he struggled not to sniff under his mask, Wave was fucked and so’s this Gato guy.

Dismissed from the Third Hokage's office, Kakashi went off in search of his team (and dogs) while the other jounin peeled off to handle their own affairs. (Gai loudly yelled that he could find his own genin and pack and be at the gate before Kakashi. With such a challenge issued, there was no time to waste.)

He found the brats running across a string of connected balconies just outside one of the slum districts. Landing in front of the kids, he grinned at them under his mask. “Yo.”

Naruto, leading the charge, slid to a stop to point wildly at the jounin, yelling, “Kaka-sensei! Late!”

Sasuke who hadn’t slowed down a bit, slammed directly into Naruto’s back while Sakura managed to grab ahold of the railing to stop her leap into the balcony the boys were now laying in. Like two book ends Sakura copied Kakashi’s low crouch on the opposite railing to peer down at the boys.

“Kakashi-sensei, it’s been three days,” Sakura deadpanned glancing up at him. Had it? He didn’t remember being sick for so long. Maybe that’s why the pack was chasing his genin across the village. He usually wanted to too after three days with them. (He was also pretty sure he had only spent three days around them max so it worked out.)

The dogs (now that he was thinking about it, he had a faint memory of telling Pakkun something about the kids but he thought he dreamt that) bounded past her, stepping on Naruto and Sasuke trying to get up, calling out, “Boss! Boss!” “Run with us?” “Come on, its fun!”

“Hmm. Sounds fun. Can’t, got a mission.”

The dogs whined at that, tails not slowing a bit. Naruto shot up, knocking Sasuke back down. “Ow, asshole,” the Uchiha hissed at the blond.

“A mission?! Where are we going!?” Ten sets of eyes and one pair of sunglasses loomed close demanding answers.

“Not—”

Before Kakashi could explain, the sliding door to the balcony snapped open and an incredibly angry
old man yelled at the team to get off his porch and threw what seemed to be the trash of a weapons collection, old and rusty and useless, at them.

Sliding to ground level, Kakashi, surrounded by dogs, called up to the kids who weren’t as dexterous yet to leap down five stories. “Not you - just me. Do what Pakkun says. Train hard. Ok, I think that’s it. Bye-bye. See you when I get back.”

With a jaunty wave, he vanished. The yelling of jilted students was continuously hilarious. Kakashi also didn’t think there was anything left to say (and he really had to blow his nose and didn’t want an audience for that). It wasn’t like the team had been together long enough to really do anything yet. No need to get emotional or anything. Besides, it wasn’t like a team of fresh-faced, rank genin could get in that much trouble. So why worry about laying out some ground rules?

Actually, no he was positive those morons would get in trouble eventually (he was currently unaware of the mounting public disobedience citations that would eventually affect his pay as a jounin sensei). At his apartment, Kakashi quickly jotted down a list of rules for Pakkun to relay to the team while he grabbed his travel kit. He refrained from writing the list on a used tissue and instead scrounged up a faded receipt to scribble on, after he found a pen that actually worked.

- Listen to Pakkun he’s smarter than all of you
- Don’t eat expired food
- Train - lots
- Do missions Pakkun’s in charge
- Stay out of trouble don’t get caught

There. That about covered it. He quickly signed the heno-heno-moheji at the bottom and left it on the table.

Time to go, he had a gangster to murder and money to steal.

On his way out the door Kakashi swung back around to grab some extra cold meds because his sinuses hurt.

He had to turn back a second time and retrieve the note he’d left for Pakkun. It was unlikely the dogs would notice it. On his way to the gates he folded the note into a paper airplane that he threw at Sakura as he passed the training grounds (it hit her in the face). (This week really wasn’t working out for her and her cool image she was trying to portray. She vowed revenge.)

He won the challenge.

--

Naruto and Sasuke both flinched and momentarily forgot what they had been arguing about when Sakura screamed and leapt up, throwing a kunai at a bush. In her hand she was holding a crumpled paper airplane. Shoulders shaking in anger, she smoothed out the paper to revel a receipt for doggy toothpaste. The boys edged closer to get a look at it.

“Whatcha got, Sakura?”

Wordlessly Sakura held it out to Naruto, who blinked down at it quietly whispering “what the fuck” to himself. Sasuke leaned over to look and snatched it from Naruto’s hands, flipping it over.
“Kakashi sent this. He wants us to do missions.”

The pack, who had been lounging in the sunbeams, perked up at the name. Pakkun called out to the genin, “Who’s in charge?”

The preteens, now crowded around each other to get a better glimpse of the paper, barely even registered the dog’s question.

Pointing at the second item on the list, Sakura asked, “Who would eat bad food?”

“Ah…. Who knows… Hey Kakashi says we can prank the village!” Naruto shifted awkwardly before rationalizing that the last point was practically giving them permission to do whatever they wanted.

“He also says we need to train and do missions. It’s been three days since we did one - let’s go,” Sasuke snapped. Turning, he marched off in the direction of the Hokage tower and the mission desk. Time to get paid to do some shit.

Naruto and Sakura shared a glance before trotting after the Uchiha. That was a solid point and Naruto was running low on food money.

The dogs watched the tweens run off before glancing at one another.

“Boss left you in charge,” Urusei said.

Pakkun snapped his teeth at Urushi. He knew that already. Poor idiots already forgot that they couldn’t do missions at the moment without first getting a metric ton of paperwork out of the way. He sighed and moved to follow the kids while ignoring the jeers from the pack. Just wait, they would get sucked into the d-ranks soon enough.

--

At the mission desk Sasuke jumped the line and stalked right up to the chunin on duty, who didn’t even bat an eye at the kid. Drawly, the chunin prompted him after an uncomfortable amount of time passed and it became clear that Sasuke’s plan did not include actually speaking. "Yeah?"

Realizing that words needed to happen, since the chunin clearly didn’t understand that only ninja in need of a mission came to the mission desk, Sasuke glanced around for one of his more outspoken teammates. They were at the back of the room completely taken aback by this entire scene and far too mortified to come to the rescue at this point (Sakura was at least – Naruto was practically crying into his jumpsuit as he laughed). Sasuke was on his own. That was fine, he was used to it.

“Team 7 reporting for assignment,” Sasuke said in his most official and commanding voice. There, that was pretty close to what Kakashi had done the last time they had gotten a mission. (Kakashi had actually walked in said “yo” and caught a scroll that was tossed at him.)

The chunin, Hagane Kotetsu according to the name plate, made a show of glancing around before turning his gaze back to the Uchiha. “Don’t see your sensei anywhere.” No genin team who hadn’t been inducted into the genin corps was allowed on missions without a jounin-sensei or special permission from said sensei.
Sakura, increasingly humiliated by this exchange saw the opening and took it. Grabbing both Naruto and Pakkun (who had arrived in time to watch the show) she approached the desk. “Uhm. Sir? Our sensei left a note saying Pakkun,” she gestured at the dog, “would lead us on missions.”

“….Right.” A vicious elbow from Naruto reminded Sasuke that he currently held the note, which he offered to Kotetsu (who was studiously avoiding eye contact with another snickering chunin farther down the desk). “This is a receipt for toothpaste… for dogs.”

“Ugh! It's on the back, dumbass!” Naruto regaining speech delicately let the occupants of the next building over know about his frustrations.

Flipping the receipt over Kotetsu hummed thinking it over. Making a decision he handed it back to the kids.

“Alright, this isn’t enough, you’re gonna to need the NinKen & Summon Mission Leaders Qualification application filled out and turned in before I can give you a mission.”

“Thank you very much!” Grabbing the back of Naruto’s shirt and Pakkun again, Sakura made a break for it, trusting that Sasuke would follow her out.

Outside of the office the team could faintly hear muffled laugher. Sakura did not slow down at all.

“Soouuuuoo…. Where we goin’, Sakura-chan?” Naruto (still being dragged along by his shirt) asked, twisting around enough to keep his feet.

Releasing her teammate and dropping the dog, Sakura, without breaking stride, promptly replied, “The library.”

“What?! Why?”

“That’s stupid.”

Individually, the boys conveyed how much they did not want to go into the library. Pakkun just continued along next to Sakura and, without looking back at the boys (who had stopped walking in affront), casually said, “Well, you can always run to the top of the monument again. Double speed this time.”

An uneasy glance was shared before the boys followed their pink teammate into the building. Conveniently, the particular library Sakura headed for was next door to the Hokage tower so they didn’t have to travel too far. She, apparently, knew exactly where she was going and aimed for the back of the building to the help desk where an older woman was sitting. She didn’t even glance up at the girl before asking for identification.

“Haruno Sakura. Genin, team 7, registration 012601.” Sakura gestured for her teammates to follow her lead.

Sighing in annoyance, Sasuke did as requested while Naruto dug through his weapons pouch for his identification card.

“Uchiha Sasuke, genin team 7, oh-one-two-six-oh-six.” He said it like it was a rhyme as if he had practiced it in front of a mirror until it had developed its own rhythm that had to be carefully enunciated every time he spoke.

Naruto reading off a crumpled card stuttered through his own identification. “Zero, one, two, six..? Wait yeah six, zero… uh seven. Uzumaki Naruto! Remember it, lady!” The librarian finally glanced
up at that to give Naruto the stink eye.

Pakkun pretended to be a dog that couldn’t speak and panted with a fake doggy grin next to Sakura.

“Uhm we are looking for team leader registration forms?” Sakura tried to distract the librarian from Naruto who was sticking his tongue out at her now. The woman, keeping one eye on Naruto, directed them to a stack of filing cabinets off to the left.

“Hey, Sakura-chan? How does she know we are who we say we are? She didn’t check any files or nothin’.” Naruto’s stage whisper echoed across the library.

Sasuke rolled his eyes and answered instead, “They don’t care, moron, genin can’t look at restricted stuff anyways.”

“Yeah, Naruto. It's like practice for when we advance or get promoted.”

“Plus there’s the seals,” Pakkun cut in. The kids all paused to look down at the dog. “Yeah, it's linked to the current shinobi logs and when you give your ID it tells the librarian if it's true or not. Pretty standard stuff.” It didn't sound standard to the genin, whose only experience with seals were minor explosive tags and inexpensive storage scrolls. There were a lot of seals in the Uzuhio district though, maybe Sakura would ask her family about it later.

Reaching the files, the kids spread out to look for the one particular application, which quickly led to Sakura telling Naruto (and politely asking Sasuke) to find a table while she got the forms. Pakkun was no help, too short to see into the cabinets and unwilling to prove he wasn’t actually an unintelligent, highly trained ninken to the woman keeping a careful eye on the team from behind her desk.

By the time the kids actually got to filling in the paperwork it became increasingly obvious that the only one in their element at the library completing paperwork was Sakura. Sasuke wasn’t paying attention and Naruto was attempting to doodle on the margins of the application as Sakura filled them out. Pakkun was sitting in the chair next to Sakura quietly answering questions as she wrote them down.

“Oh no. It says that Kaka-sensei needs to sign this for authorization…” Sakura, realizing she had filled in 10 pages of work for nothing, moped down at the page. Naruto groaned and thumped his head down onto the table. Sasuke was probably napping again judging by his lack of reaction. (Sakura wondered if the boy got enough sleep and quietly vowed to do something extra nice for him later.)

Pakkun eyeing the papers and cleared his throat to say, “Technically an apprentice and a team captain can sign in absentee of the jounin-sensei…”

Naruto, cheek pressed against the table, glowered at the dog. “How d’you know all that and what happened to the last genin team you led anyways?”

Struck by how astute that line of questioning actually was, Sakura also turned to look at the dog who only shrugged his shoulders and replied, “Nothing permanent. No one died or anything,” which didn’t set anyone’s minds at ease or actually answer the question.

Whatever, Sakura shook her head as Naruto took it upon himself to explain why that wasn’t helpful and went looking for the apprenticeship applications, team captain form, and squad qualifications. Best to be prepared.

By the time all the paperwork had been completed the team had held two votes (one for team captain
and one to kick Naruto off the squad), had a minor conniption over who would sign as Kakashi’s apprentice (they finally agreed that all of them would sign and filled out separate apprenticeship applications that would be reviewed by their jounin-sensei upon his return from his mission and temporarily counted as complete until he did so), and realized that they needed to get the documents notarized. Luckily the librarian was willing to help out for the low low price of all their pocket money and a contract written for the complete mission pay of their first c-rank also notarized and signed (her name, it turned, out was Ogawa Yasuo and when Sasuke tried to hold out on her, she bared her teeth - most of which had been filed into points - and asked him to think again).

When team captaincy became an issue Naruto immediately put forth his name loudly. “Imma vote for myself! Uzumaki Naruto!”

“Oh my god, Naruto, you’re gonna get us kicked out, be quiet!” Sakura was quick to shut him down as the librarian shot them the hairy eyeball from her desk. (They hadn't known about the teeth yet.)

Sasuke cut in with a low “I vote for myself.” He didn’t want to be squad captain but his teammates were idiots so it would probably work out for the best if he was in charge. (He also decided that his blunder earlier at the mission desk wouldn’t happen again and that he would use his soon-to-be powers of authority to delegate someone else to do the talking.)

“O-oh Sasuke-kun… uhm well I… vote for myself too!” Sakura didn’t want to be the only one who didn’t vote for themself which put the team exactly where they started in the first place.

“I vote for Sakura. And so does Kakashi,” Pakkun put in.

“HEY, you don’t get a vote!”

“I vote we get rid of Naruto.” If Sasuke wasn’t going to be captain he was going to make the most of the temporary democracy and get rid of at least one annoyance.

“I second that.”

“Thirded and fourthed.”

“Fuck all of you.”

Chapter End Notes

so only part of this is beta read so if theres any glaring mistakes pls let me know lol anyways now we get some plot and i SKIPPED THE ENTIRE WAVE ARC HAHAHAHA
but for real. imagine. no wave arc. no magic eyeballs happening yet. no scary fox chakra. no oh ha look the girl is better then y’all dumbasses. none of that. just pure stupid kids getting conned out of their lunch money and filling out forms that a talking dog won’t be straight about - will the kids ever find out about that fateful mission that lost pakkun his ability to lead genin? stay tuned folks
It took two whole days for the paperwork to process and in that time Sakura and Sasuke got an up-close and personal look at Naruto’s daily life. Because he somehow got evicted. She’s still not sure how that happened, to be perfectly honest, but she also had to sit through multiple loud retellings of what went down.

Supposedly the village provided for all orphans with the expectation they would enter the academy and either join the military upon graduation or, if they washed out, would work as non-combatant support staff for the village. Which was standard, all academy applicants signed a decade of their life to the village in return for training, the orphans just gave a little more. Apparently that village stipend ended when Naruto became a genin as he was expected to pay his own way. Which would have worked if they had continued to take missions as frequently as possible – and not given all their pocket money to an old lady with shark teeth.

Instead, team 7 hadn’t taken a single mission in four days, and when Naruto returned home that night it was to the locks changed and most of his belongings in the street. The building’s super cited noise complaints and late rent as the reason and told Naruto to get lost. And Naruto, not knowing what to do, had grabbed all he owned with a multitude of clones and gone to Sasuke’s apartment.

He didn’t know where Sakura lived otherwise he might have gone there first. She was smart and might have known what to do.

Sasuke, who hadn’t been sleeping, opened the door when Naruto banged on it a few times, snarling, “What? I was asleep. Go away.”

“Ahhhh… yeah, can I sleep here?”

“No,” Sasuke said slamming the door in Naruto’s face. Or tried to at least. Naruto managed to squeeze an arm through the gap and keep the door from shutting properly. He practically oozed through the door, wailing at Sasuke that teams needed to stick together.

A little while later, Naruto was sitting at a low table in Sasuke’s living room, all of his belongings piled up around the entrance. Sasuke, who had no interest in receiving guests, did not offer Naruto anything to drink and Naruto, who had never been a guest in anyone’s home in his entire life, did not notice the slight.

Glaring at each other, the silence echoed uncomfortably. Before Sasuke sighed and relented.

“Don’t eat or touch anything. This is for tonight. Only.” And he then disappeared into his bedroom firmly closing and locking the door. Naruto huffed, and stuck his tongue out at the closed door but kept his comments to himself before rolling out his mission bedroll (never before used by Naruto! Certified preowned by someone else!).

--
It did not in fact occur to Naruto to ask Iruka-sensei for a place to stay that night or the following day, but it did occur to Sakura when Sasuke appeared the next morning with Naruto in tow for their now-daily running of the hounds.

“Wait so…. You were evicted? It hasn’t been two weeks since graduation!”

Sakura was huffing and puffing as she ran up the stairs while Naruto took them two or three at a time. Sasuke was doing knee to chest lifts each step; Sakura wondered if he knew he looked like a crane every time he did that. (Sasuke did not know what he looked like but did know he was bored staying in stride with Sakura, but last time he’d tried to leave her behind on the stairs, Bull had sat on him for half an hour.)

“Yeah I dunno I stayed with chicken legs last night,” Naruto said jerking his thumb at Sasuke. (So it wasn’t just Sakura that saw it.) “Anyways, don’t know what to do now, ‘m outa money…”

Sakura was silent for the rest of the trip up the mountain. The dogs were fairly sedated today too, and the boys weren’t going at it like usual. (She also tried to pick up her pace about halfway up and couldn’t pull in enough air to actually speak the rest of the climb.)

After she’d caught her breath, Sakura brought up the idea of staying with Iruka-sensei who was known for letting academy students stay with him when they had no one at home or nowhere to go.

Naruto rubbing the back of his head laughed it off. “I mean maybe but I never stayed with him in the academy so I don’t wanna get in the way…”

“You were in my way idiot.”

Valiantly ignoring Sasuke (it’s for your own good, Sakura cried out in her head) Sakura glanced down at Pakkun who had also been listening all morning while the boys complained. The dog shrugged, he’d never had to worry about leases or housing or even buying kibble, Kakashi took care of all that – he usually followed the list and bought the correct shampoo even. Actually, that made him think of something.

“Do you at least have the lease?” the pug asked the orange hobo.

“A... lease? Nnnno? I’ve lived there since I was 6.” Sakura blinked at Naruto flabbergasted. Six? Since he was six? How? That made no sense. Whatever, that meant he was moved there under the Konoha Orphan Public Service and Resources Committee, which meant his lease would be on the books. She could work with that. (Sakura was the child of refugees and every single member of her family actively complained about or fought against the KOP and their latest sanction, the bunch of ruthless thugs.)

Sasuke, suddenly realizing that his silent insults hadn’t even been understood that night or morning, kicked a rock at Naruto and nailed him in the face with it.

“Moron.”

By noon, Sakura had managed to drag the boys and Pakkun to the public records archive in the basement of the Hokage tower. After jumping through a few hoops, making Naruto hula dance, and
Sasuke threatening to light someone’s hair on fire (the hoops and the hula might not have happened but Sasuke really did harass a poor non-com) it turned out that Naruto’s lease was in the public record. Completely redacted and completely useless.

“Naruto… what the fuck…”

“Yeah I dunno.”

So Sakura set out to talk with the tenant office. This, she swore to herself, would be her extra nice good deed for Sasuke. It couldn’t be good for his health and sleep schedule to have Naruto hanging around. Solving such small problems for her idiotic subordinates also helped cement her place as team captain.

Obviously they should all be grateful for her heroic aid in their time of need!

Naruto was of no help at the office as he yelled about how it wasn’t fair, while Sasuke lurked and glared in the background, and Pakkun sat at her feet and watched. Occasionally the man Sakura was speaking with, amidst his blustering and yelling, would insult Naruto and the dog would growl dangerously and the man would change his wording mid-breath.

Finally, Sakura had a breakthrough when she asked about the back rent.

“It goes week to week for you ninja. He’s missed ‘em.”

“So if he pays his back rent and keeps up with it, he can have his apartment back? Great!”

Sakura beamed at the super with all the guile of a child. It wasn’t going to be that easy but Sakura didn’t have much of a back-up plan other than steamrolling the civilian and threatening him with knives (which would result in a citation and personally she wanted to be the only member of team 7 not to receive one).

The man huffs and glances around for an escape, and gladly latches onto the first he finds. “Get out, kids, office is closed or I'll have you fined for trespassing.”

It’s Sasuke who snaps that they will be back tomorrow to finish this before storming out. Naruto juts his jaw out and nods in agreement before following. Sakura watches them go for a second before turning back to the civilian for one last word, eyeing his desk for a nameplate.

“See you later, Ueda-san. I'm sure that we will reach an agreement. Right, Pakkun-sensei?” Sakura, still smiling, glanced down at the dog who blinked up at her catching on that he hadn’t actually spoken the whole time.

“Probably the best outcome, Sakura. Later, Ueda.” And with that the two followed the boys leavening a suddenly nervous civilian in their wake.

--

The team meandered their way across the village, plotting as they went. To sum it all up they needed to take as many missions as possible as fast as possible, get Naruto out of Sasuke’s apartment, and train as often as possible according to the note Kakashi left. Pakkun was available for the first and last of the list but the middle parts were a little stickier.
“Ok, generally rookie genin get the cheapest of the d-ranks… which means we are going to need to pack in a lot in a day to actually make the amount we need… which means that we need to start as soon as the desk opens up for the day… and theoretically we could… hm… yeah that would work…. More paperwork… I bet I could get it in on time… plus training…. We need to do a few hours a day… and we need to eat… sleep is important…” Sakura mumbled mostly to herself.

By this point the boys where headed for Ichiraku while Sakura trailed behind them (Pakkun ditched out earlier with strict orders to meet up at 6am). Sasuke was hungry and was not willing to feed Naruto and if he went home now the idiot would just whine for something to eat there. Maybe he could foist the care and safekeeping of Naruto on Sakura. It’d work out great; she’d kill him within the night.

“Why didn’t you go to Sakura’s?”

“Uhhh… dun’ know where she lives.” Naruto scratched at his cheek. Maybe that wasn’t very ninja-y of him to not know that but he was pretty sure Sasuke didn’t know either (he didn’t).

“Hm. Sakura,” Sasuke said cutting the rambling girl off. “Where do you live?”

Sakura blinked at Sasuke completely floored. Sasuke was asking her where she lived? Where she lived? Her? Oh no Sasuke was asking her where she lived. Abort, abort.

“Oh! Sasuke-kun! Uhm. I.. Live around here! Yeah. Near by. To here. That-a-way.” She gestured down the street feeling her will to live slowly fading. If she could die here and now, just drop dead that would be great.

“What, really? Sakura-chan! I wanna see your house!” Naruto was not helping.

“Yeah Sakura, let’s go.” Neither was Sasuke.

What was this gang up on Sakura day? After she was so nice earlier? Hell no she wasn’t doing this right now.

“I actually have to go do more paperwork! You know captain stuff! So that – that we can take more missions! And make money! Ok bye!” She promptly turned tail and ran. There was no way she was going to let Sasuke into her house without at least three or four days of prepping. Her parents would embarrass her, the baby pictures needed to be removed from the walls. And Naruto might show up in the middle of the night or something and try and prank her and then she would get arrested for murder and it would be terrible for her sleep schedule.

“I think that was your fault,” said Naruto watching the girl scamper up a fire escape. She really liked running up high for some reason.

“Pffttt. Whatever.”

--

Sakura did follow through on her word of doing even more paperwork for missions, registering the team with the genin corps, and applying for multi team missions as well. Pakkun happily told the kids that each mission could be used as training if they applied themselves correctly and readily encouraged them to take just one more for every mission they completed.
Unfortunately, those missions were generally filthy unthankful work. Hard labor and long hours. The
genin cleaned out gutters, weeded gardens, trapped varmints, disposed of the varmints, inspected
sewers for any blockages, and caught that goddamn cat at least six times. The sewer system was a
mess of elegant strategic thinking and outdated cheap labor techniques. Some of these pipelines
predated the founding of the hidden village when the area was only populated by a small market
town of a post office, the temple, a brothel, and a few streets of housing. All maps, while technically
correct, could not be trusted unquestionably as the sewers were designed for difficult access in order
to mislead and waylay invaders who would attempt to seize the city from below. It was frustrating
and slow work, and while the lines were regularly prowled by ANBU they were not maintained by
the elite. That was a job for the genin corps and recently it was a mission for Team 7. The only
upside was Pakkun teaching them a trick with their chakra while traveling through the sewers.

Apparently it was possible to use chakra to stick to walls and ceilings with your feet as if you were
walking on flat land. It was very impressive and explained how older shinobi got around so easily.
Every child of the leaf knew how to climb, it came fairly quickly after walking here, but the ability to
walk up walls was a game changer. For Sakura at least. The boys were having a harder and much
more disgusting time learning the new trick.

As she trotted along the wall (her stomach in agony at the new core workout) she listened to the boys
screaming at each other, themselves, and the filth behind her. This was the seventh line they had
braved that day (and the fifteenth overall) and Pakkun had only shown them how to do this two
hours ago.

She was disgusting and smelled like the bowels of a diseased rodent. Her parents might not let her in
the house later, if they were even able to complete their missions before the day was over. Her hair
was shellacked to her skull despite having pulled it back earlier to keep it out of the way. A shove
from Sasuke earlier had sent Naruto careening into her which had caused Sakura to fall off a ledge
and into the stagnate pool she had marked down for the secondary team to deal with only moments
before. It was after that Pakkun decided to show them how to walk on walls.

She was exhausted, hungry, nauseous from the smell, and wanted nothing more than to crawl into
her shower and scrub till the water ran cold. The boys were as unhelpful as always (sorry Sasuke-
kun!) and Pakkun was staying firmly out of reach of anyone and frequently made use of the
manholes to escape.

As Sakura peered at a crack near the ceiling of the pipeline the boys suddenly stopped making noise.
Alarmed she turned to see what had happened to them, mildly hoping Naruto had been eaten by a
sewer crocodile. Naruto and Sasuke had continued past her while she inspected the crack for
structural damage and had disappeared into the darkness ahead. Dropping down to an easier height
to make her way through the lines, Sakura ran after the boys with increasing worry. Palming a knife
as she went.

“Sasuke-kun? Naruto? GUYS!”

No one answered her but as she rounded a bend a horrific scream echoed back to her. Panicking, she
ran even faster, unknowingly using her new talent of basic chakra manipulation to aid her speed,
because that didn’t sound good and she didn’t know where Pakkun was and maybe a sewer croc
was eating them.

She was moving so quickly that in the dim lighting she nearly came unglued to the wall and fell into
the drainage basin. Panting, she looked around, feet slipping on the damp concrete. She finally
noticed the boys a few levels lower where Sasuke was laying in a heap and Naruto was flitting
around him like a bumble bee around a fake flower.
“Hey!! What happened?”

“Sakura-chan! Sasuke is dying!” Great, Sakura was here, she could take responsibility for everything since she was team captain now.

Sakura was glad she pulled a knife when she did, hopefully it would come in handy against whatever attacked them.

“I’m not dying, asshole, you broke my leg,” Sasuke said trying not to actually look at it. When Sakura got a better glimpse of the boy and his… leg, she lost control of her chakra and slid down the drainage basin into the pool and dropped her kunai into the murk.

Legs were not suppose to look like that. It was rapidly swelling and turning a nasty purple color under all the muck and Sasuke was loosing color in his face. Naruto was dancing around uselessly and Pakkun wasn’t here to take charge and Sasuke needed rescuing. It was her time. Sakura’s moment. To prove to everyone how incredible she was. How remarkable. How much everyone needed her to save the day.

Climbing out of the pool she grabbed Naruto by the shirt dragging him down to kneeling level with Sasuke.

“We gotta make a splint and get to the hospital. Damn I wish we had mics for this. What happened?”

The boys eyed each other silent as the grave before Naruto croaked out, “Sasuke tried to jump across and fell like the idiot he is.” Sasuke, who's strength was sapped by the sight of his leg going two incompatible directions, mustered the reserve to swat at Naruto.

“No! I did not. You distracted me when you fell!” Neither were going to admit that a rat had crawled out of a hole had made direct eye contact with the both of them and lit a cigarette before telling them to piss off. Both of them fell in surprise after Naruto tried to challenge the rat to a duel and slid down the wall into Sasuke who was so bewildered by a talking rat that he lost his footing and fell 25 feet into the basin, causing his leg to strike the safety railing.

They ended up admitting it anyway while yelling at each other about blame.

“You broke my LEG!”

“IT WAS THE RAT!”

“What rat?”

“If YOU hadn’t tried to punch it this wouldn’t have happened!”

“Yeah well.. It still wasn’t my fault! ‘Sides you’re the one that broke a bone so that just means you ain’t that great, huh?”

“…right I’m just going to splint this now, it's gonna hurt.”

“You eat my food – break my leg – insult mEEEEEEE FUCK!”

“Ugh gross, it made a noise? Is it suppose to do that?”

“Naruto, lets just get out of here.”

Technically this was the fault of shoddy training by dog and an absent sensei and also a talking rat that Sakura determined was hallucinated by the boys after inhaling fumes from the sewer system.
(She marked that on the maps for the secondary team to look into as well.) Technically Sakura was team captain and her subordinate got hurt on her watch. Technically Sakura was in for it. Technically she was a legal adult and in the eyes of the law could be treated as such. Technically Sakura had to answer for her team’s stupidity.

The nurses fussed over the last Uchiha as if he was a celebrity, adored by all. The trauma care medic-nin on duty was not as impressed. Setting the leg and healing it as much as hospital regulation allowed, she quizzed down the kids on what happened, making notes in the team and personal files.

“Where’s your sensei?” the medic asked.

“He left Pakkun in charge while he went on a mission.” Sakura was going to be as professional as possible.

“Yeah, lady Kaka-sensei knows what’s up.” Naruto wasn’t going to be professional because he didn’t know what professional was.

“Right. And you’re squad captain?” Why the hell were these kids running around and voting on captains so fast. What happened to normal baby ninja who did nothing but yell at each other and their sensei for a few years then got their act together and discovered paperwork?

“Yes ma’am.” Oh no Sakura was going to be put down as the responsible party. She couldn’t be responsible for anything – she was twelve! – just look at her she was covered in filth what kind of adult was covered in filth even if it was for the mission?

“How many missions have you done in the last two days exactly?” This was the third time the medic asked.

“This was our twelfth.” They needed to make money fast and missions were the best option for newly minted assassins looking to make some cash and not get arrested. No need to let the medic in on how many under the table jobs they would be taking in the next few days.

“And your sensei left you under the care of a dog that’s not even here.” The medic closed her eyes searching for benediction. Why were jounin like this?

“Yes ma’am.” Oh no Sakura was going to be put down as the responsible party. She couldn’t be responsible for anything – she was twelve! – just look at her she was covered in filth what kind of adult was covered in filth even if it was for the mission?

“How many missions have you done in the last two days exactly?” This was the third time the medic asked.

“This was our twelfth.” They needed to make money fast and missions were the best option for newly minted assassins looking to make some cash and not get arrested. No need to let the medic in on how many under the table jobs they would be taking in the next few days.

“And your sensei left you under the care of a dog that’s not even here.” The medic closed her eyes searching for benediction. Why were jounin like this?

“Yes, we said that lady. And he’s a talking dog, get it straight.” Naruto had to set the record.

“I need a responsible adult who isn’t twelve to take care of you,” the medic directed at Sasuke who was prodding at the cast on his leg. It needed to stay on for two weeks while the bone completed healing to remove the strain from the surrounding muscles and tendons. Hospital Regulations during peace time made it so a non-life threatening injury would be healed to the point the shinobi could complete their usual mission load – though in the case of genin only to the point that they learned from their mistakes early on in their career. Typically, it meant a cast and restrictions on training and mission load.

“Sure. I know adults.” Sasuke didn’t know adults beyond Iruka and Kakashi and neither was available at the moment.

“It’ll be ok. My parents can help out.” Sasuke was not staying in Sakura’s house because she was
pretty sure that would mean Naruto would be staying in her house and she hadn’t had time to make her house Sasuke-proof so he didn’t see anything embarrassing. But all ninja worth their salt knew how to lie when needed.

The medic, who didn’t really have a way to hold Sasuke in the hospital, relented and sent the team off with strict instructions. She had no doubt that they would be back and that they would not listen to her recommendations.

--

The next day Sasuke was kept home from mission work and Sakura and Naruto were put on a multi-team squad to continue surveying the sewer system. Team Gai was a terror. First there was the boy in green with the eyebrows who talked louder than Naruto, then the Hyuuga with a stick so far up his ass it could scratch his brain, and finally the girl who seemed to roll with the punches before hitting back twice as hard. Actually she was pretty cool.

Pakkun took one look at the green clad boy and wished he could leave – he felt bad for Sasuke getting hurt on his watch and wasn’t about to leave these idiots up to their own devices again. Naruto immediately set out to make enemies with Hyuuga Neji, smelling a pompous brat a mile away. Sakura could only hope that this mission cleared without any more trips to the hospital.

Tenten was remarkably well adjusted for all her teammates’ quirks and easily took the lead on the mission. She smiled at Sakura when she introduced herself and causally told Sakura that she looked forward to working together even if it was in a sewer. Sakura was struck by the professionalism and class the older girl possessed and decided then and there she would do everything in her power to get more missions with team Gai in the future.

Not even Rock Lee waxing poetic about her pink hair and beauty – or something about blossoms and youth she assumed it meant beauty – made her think twice about that personal vow. Female solidarity was sacred and Tenten had earned it.

The actual excursion into the sewer went off much better than the day before. Neji did, however, end up mocking Naruto for not being able to walk on the walls yet and Lee came to his rescue before Naruto tried to deck the bastard.

“Fear not, Naruto! I too cannot yet walk on walls but with due diligence to our training we will be able to achieve it soon enough!” This was punctuated with a clenched fist and a sparkly grin.

Naruto, unnerved by the enthusiasm and delighted by the camaraderie, shouted out his own agreement and went back to attempting wall climbing. Neji scoffed and continued on at a safe height, out of reach from the bright boys.

“Is he always like that?” Sakura asked. Maybe two loud preteens would cancel each other out?

“Sometimes he’s worse. What about yours?” Tenten cheerfully replied. Her team was weird, she was used to it, and had come to see the ways that could be used to her own advantage in the field.

Sakura eyed Naruto as he shook a fist at Neji’s back before charging head-first at a slime covered wall considered it. “About the same actually.”

“Che. Figures you wouldn’t be doing your job. Get back to work.” Neji had passed by the girls and,
ignoring the fact that his own teammate was standing around as well, had made direct eye contact with Sakura while he said that. He also gave her a once over and made no attempt to hide that he found something lacking.

Affronted, Sakura shook her own fist at the boy’s back while Tenten snorted next to her. Pakkun sat on the ceiling and could only shake his head at baby ninja dynamics. They would probably never learn.

Elsewhere Sasuke practiced sticking his feet to his apartment wall while laying on the ground. It wasn’t going great and he was going to need to make a trip to the store for spackle to fix a hole or three. He could probably blame it on Naruto. Or use something in all that shit Naruto had dumped in his apartment. Rolling over, Sasuke reached for the closest box. Time to find some secrets.

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU for all the love!!! Im actually kinda shocked by the response I've gotten for this! <3

Anyways enter team Gai! And yes. for those wondering the rat was the result of fumes. Toxic radioactive fumes that turned a normal rat into a trash-talking chain-smoker. I hope everyone enjoys reading this as much as I've enjoyed writing it so far! there will be more dogs in the next chapter ;P

Also if you want you can buy me a coffee while i work :DDD
Chapter 5

The morning after meeting team Gai, Sakura stumbled into the training grounds and into an argument that had been going on for most of the night between the boys.

“-Up! It does so count as a magical girl transformation!” Naruto seemed to be particularly loud this morning.

“Pfftt no. You’re just a loser.” Sasuke, just as frustrated, somehow managed to keep a normal volume. Both of them had their arms crossed and stood face to face glowering at each other.

Naruto, flushing, argued, “Even if I was – which ‘m not! – that just makes it more true! Cause, cause most magical girls are losers! Or at least the leads are!”

“Ha!” Sasuke threw his head back practically crowing. “It’s not a transformation and you would definitely not be the lead!”

Neither boy seemed to even realize that Sakura was standing there looking between the two of them as they argued. “Uh.. hey guys,” she started, even managing an awkward little wave.

And then, almost seamlessly, the boys dragged her into the argument as if she had been a part of it the entire time. Or even held some sort of stake in it for that matter. (Or knew what a magical girl was? A girl that was magical? Why would she transform? Was that the magic? Like a henge? Or was it something else?)

“Sakura! Hey!” Naruto’s sudden beaming smile could wink out the sun. “So you know, my super awesome sexy transformation jutsu! It’s totally a magical girl transformation right?”

Sasuke’s intense glower, now directed at the girl, made Sakura faintly wish she’d stayed in bed that morning. What the hell did they want from her? Trying to figure it out, she managed a faint answer, “I mean... you turn? Into a girl right?”

There, no mention of magic! She had to be in the clear with Sasuke now!

“That doesn’t make it magical!” or not… “Chakra! Isn’t! Magic!” Sasuke punctuated each word with a vicious finger stab at each of his team members in turn.

“Nahhh! You’re just jealous you’re not a magical girl!” Naruto, still grinning, turned its power onto Sasuke.

“I am not!” he shouted, complete with a voice crack. Sakura boggled at the boy struggling not to flush as Naruto opened his mouth to call him out. The sound of dogs in the distance had him clicking his jaw shut before, as one, team 7 took off in a sprint for the distant mountain. (Well Naruto and Sakura did before remembering the cast on Sasuke’s foot. The resulting argument to convince the Uchiha to let one of his team members carry him ended when Sakura and Naruto each grabbed an arm and hoisted the protesting boy between the two of them.)
Sakura gawked up at the large building. It was massive. Easily one of the largest buildings in the district and possibly the next three. It wasn’t exceedingly tall, at most three stories, but it sprawled across half a block. Located in the middle of the Uzushio district (named for the abundance of Uzushio refugees) the building had fallen into disrepair in the last 5 years after the previous proprietor had been disappeared under commission from the bank.

(Disappearance and kill missions are the bread and butter of all shinobi villages, that was a given, but in a world where any dipshit could play a ninja video game and fake kill their enemies, the idea of having these missions available to just any client… wasn’t pleasant. Konoha killed two birds with one stone in their very practical handling of this issue. They kept meticulous files on who commissioned the kill, when they ordered it, when it was supposed to be carried out, and the level of visibility required in the aftermath – some people wanted it to be messy. Shinobi names were left out of that paperwork, obviously, but the paperwork existed solely to blackmail said clients in the future. No one wanted their hit list aired out like dirty laundry. It had the appeal of keeping most idiots looking for a kill mission off their door step which kept the visible count down which helped cement their place as the Nice Village. They really weren’t, of course, but they just kept better files than most.)

Recently, an enterprising moron had bought up the bathhouse intending to return it to its former glory.

And then he had thrown open the doors and wished his iron clad purchase could be walked back.

After trying for weeks to get civilian contractors to clean up the mess, the new owner finally caved and contracted the village to clean and repair the building. Emphasis on clean.

Oh Sakura had seen the building her whole life, living two streets south of it. Had crawled up the drain pipes, peered through dirty windows looking for akaname, been chased off the scaffolding on the south side. The works. She knew how large the building was, pushing deep underground for the boiler and storage. She was more alarmed that the mission desk seemed to think that a pack of genin could clean this place up and come out of it alive. Or with the building still standing.

They’d been assigned to work with team Gai again and Sasuke, upon meeting them, solidly backed up Naruto’s anti-Neji stance and was silently campaigning an anti-eyebrow stance as well. She wasn’t sure what had happened between Naruto and Sasuke but they were still snapping about magical girls (no one had cleared up what that even was) and something had somehow happened to a wall. Though the second Neji started in on Naruto about being rude to the client, Sasuke had snapped at the Hyuuga as if he’d insulted the Uchiha matriarch.

It was unnerving.

Glancing down at Pakkun, at his now customary place near her toes, Sakura asked, “They want us to clean that?”

“Yep.” Pakkun was grinning his doggy grin.

“Sakura it’ll be easy! At least they don’t have us scrubbing the sewers after what happened the other day – could you imagine?” Tenten was a font of inspiration. Heartened by the words of the older girl, Sakura nodded decisively.

“Yeah, that would be pretty terrible.”
Together the two girls walked through the main entrance of the building to get a better look at what they were working with. Lee happily trotting in behind them next to Pakkun while Sasuke, Naruto, and Neji continued sniping at one another.

The interior of the building was worse than expected. Trapped by nearly half a decade of stale air and rot, the stink of the building came rushing out as they pushed through the main entrance. Sakura gagged and dug around in her kit for a mask or a bandana or something to block out the smell. It was somehow fouler than the sewers. Next to her, Tenten and Lee did the same as Pakkun wrinkled his snout and tried not to let his eyes water.

“What the fuck is that - did something die?” Naruto asked while recoiling physically away from the door, putting Sasuke between him and the building like a human shield against the smell.

Sasuke eyed the door for a second and then said, “That’s not what dead bodies smell like.”

Naruto’s wide eyes left the door to blink, horrified, at his teammate.

“That is what death smells like after a few years,” Neji sneered at the younger boys, not to be left out.

Gasping, Naruto glanced between the two clan kids, undecided about who was more messed up.

“If there was someone dead in there, they’d be removed by now and that’s probably something else anyways,” Sakura snapped, voice muffled by the bandana she’d wrapped around her face. When she hadn’t found anything to block the smell, Tenten, the saint, had offered her a spare.

Lee, grinning, bounced on his toes next to the two girls and offered up an attack plan. “We should push through the smell and open all windows and doors to the outside as fast as we can! Fresh air and spring weather will help us clean this building faster than ever before!”

“Yeah we should also pair up. Keep an eye out for structure damage and other stuff I guess. Meet back in… 20 minutes?” Tenten started out strong then hesitated towards the end making eye contact with the younger girl and then dropping her gaze to the dog for reassurance. She wasn’t afraid of coming up with a game plan or making sure the squad followed through but she also didn’t want to say anything stupid and she’d never run through an entire building opening windows and doors quite as large as this one before.

“Great! I’ll go with Tenten!” Sakura enthused, the other girl was so sophisticated and prepared to lead multi-team squads even if they were only genin. Sakura needed to learn everything.

“You will?” Naruto asked, surprised Sakura didn’t leap at the chance to traverse the creepy building with Sasuke and slightly annoyed he hadn’t called dibs on Sakura before she spoke up. It would have been the perfect opportunity to hold her hand or something. Like if he saw a ghost Sakura could punch it and then he could hold her hand or be… rescued by her from it? Admittedly, that was a weak attempt at brainstorming.

Sasuke, also surprised by the girls banding together, promptly chose the best of the rest to partner with. “I’ll go with Pakkun.”

“Sorry kid I’m sticking with Sakura for this one. Boss squad right here.” Sakura and Tenten were already walking into dim building and waved back at the boys.

Shit.
Finding and opening all the windows and doors of the building was the easy part, truth be told. Next they had to remove all excess furniture, other appliances, and trash left inside the building before they could get to the actual cleaning. Unfortunately, the squad also had to deal with disposal of the trash and couldn’t just leave it on the curb for later. They had been equipped with standard cleaning kits which included large trash bags but it was going to be a long couple of days.

Abundant use of Naruto’s clones and Lee’s enthusiasm helped speed along the furniture and appliance removal. The trash was another story, though. Armed with brooms, Neji and Sakura took to sweeping the trash (paper, leaves, more paper, dirt, something that looked like paper but didn’t behave like paper, dead bugs, dead rats) into large piles while Tenten and Sasuke worked in tandem to bag and tag behind them. Limited in range and ability by the cast on his leg, Sasuke snapped increasingly at everyone and everything.

Eventually the first layer had been removed from most of the building, minus the kitchens and the boiler rooms, and the team started to work from the top down. The third floor of the building was exclusively rooms for guests and workers during their stay and wasn’t quite as bad as the rest of the building.

They removed broken and damaged fusuma and shoji doors. Inspected the tatami for damage as they moved the mats into the back courtyard for airing out. More than one would be headed for the trash. Sakura kept careful notes on the salvageable materials left in the building to report back to the client at the completion of the mission.

While Pakkun technically held rank, he lacked the thumbs required to write reports and none of the members of team Gai currently held any sanctioned authority within their team which, in a terrible sense of irony, left Sakura as the thumb-having ranking member of the squad. If team 7 hadn’t completed the official paperwork for captaincy one of the members of team Gai could have stepped forward as their seniority authorized. (In non-corps genin teams the actual authorization of rank and position and seniority was fuzzy at best and completely unregulated at worst as usually non-corps genin either died or got promoted before it actually mattered in the long run.)

Neji had been outraged that Sakura had Konoha authorized captaincy and theoretically could order him around. Lee had been delighted by Sakura’s enthusiasm in building a proper foundation for her team to flourish. And Tenten had grinned and nudged the other girl in the ribs joking that the pay raise wasn’t bad either (Sakura hadn’t known about a pay raise and made plans to go back to the library to find out more).

The cleaning and restoration of the bathhouse was commissioned to last a week and a half with pay periods of every three days. After team 7 and team Gai split on the third day, Sakura marched her unruly teammates back to Naruto’s building.

Armed with a new found working knowledge of the village zoning and housing laws, the general guidelines outlined by KOPs, and her power as a rank and file ninja earning a regular pay check, Sakura was positive she would get Naruto back into his apartment and out of Sasuke’s hair.
She was also positive that Naruto and Sasuke may have been abducted by podpeople since recently their arguments... well they haven’t been less violent... but have been far more focused on manga and to a lesser extent video games. Specifically, shoujo manga. (She’d done her research and figured out what a magical girl was thank you very much. Sasuke could totally be a magical girl if he wanted and when she told him that yesterday the boy sputtered in his strange stoic way before storming off. She was getting somewhere! She just knew it!)

At the entrance to the building she turned to her teammates. “Okay, stay by the book and follow the plan! Naruto that means keeping your mouth shut unless I give you the signal. *That includes right now!”*

---

Sakura promptly wasted the meticulously detailed plan (flashcards included!) and steamrolled the super for the keys and a new lease. In one breath she managed to quote no less than three housing statutes, a committee ruling, and Ueda’s own words from earlier that week. Naruto needed to pay his rent, make back rent, and maintain. And Sakura, the proper captain that she was, made sure that Naruto came equipped with a bank account capable of making autodraft payments. (It wasn’t under his name - for some reason they couldn’t get that to work so Naruto had been unofficially adopted into the Haruno family as a cousin’s cousin in the paperwork for the Uzushio District Bank – basically the papers got a little fudged and read *Uzumaki Haruno Naruto! Believe it!*)

Wrapping up her five-minute dressing down of a self-righteous slum lord, Sakura turned to Sasuke flashing the signal as she asked, “Do you think there was anything else, Sasuke-kun, that Naruto needs?”

And as if they had planned it (which they had) Sasuke hummed for a second before saying, “He shouldn’t have to pay rent for today or the last three days, or tomorrow for this mess.”

Naruto, shutting up and letting Sakura make things happen for him, could only gape in astonishment (also part of the plan). Sakura smiled happily and turned back to the building’s super.

“I think Sasuke-kun is right! Its been such a hassle and we’re so new to all of this and, just, our team is *just* starting out and how can we become the best shinobi possible when one of our teammates has been treated this way…. I mean look at Pakkun! He’s just a cute ninja dog no reason for him to be dragged into this and here he is…. Maybe we should mention it to the K.O.P. that the rules need updating for recent genin….” Sakura trailed off peering up at the super with wide green eyes and faint wobble in her lip as if the idea of bringing up everything that had happened was truly that terrible.

(Not that she knew it really *would be* that terrible if the Hokage got word of this. She did count on the KOP striking fear into the super’s heart so that was part of the plan at least.)

Pakkun, grinning that wide doggy grin of his, tacked on helpfully, “Plus when Kakashi gets back and asks us for a training report he’ll definitely have to explain to the Hokage why his team wasn’t training as hard as they could be…”

It worked. Naruto got his keys back, his apartment had been mysteriously cleaned, and the super even waved the back rent and the current week’s rent as an apology for the misunderstanding. (Even better than planned.)
Setting up in the empty apartment the three kids promptly celebrated their accomplishment.

“Sakura-chan you were SO cool!”

“Wasn’t I? This means you owe me Naruto!” Sakura said dramatically pointing at the blond nodding in agreement.

“Great, now get your shit out of my house.”

---

That was really only the start of it all. Eventually Naruto hauled his possessions, once again, across the village.

And then had to go back when he discovered half his salvaged collection of manga had mysteriously vanished.

Chapter End Notes

Heeeeyyyyyyyyy its been forever but i promise i haven't forgotten about this!!!
lol i about drove off the road when i thought of the first bit of dialog for this
anyways hope everyone enjoys this installment its gearing up for some fun times ;D
buy me a coffee so maybe i can write a wee bit faster on a caffeine high Ko-fi.com/behenna
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In Sakura’s defense this wasn’t part of the plan when she woke up this morning. It wasn’t even part of her greater “How to Ninja Like a Successful Assassin Should” plan she dreamt up when she was 5 and applying to the academy. This was a slight hiccup to a generally well thought out and highly modified childhood dream. A small hitch. Not a big deal. Wouldn’t really matter in the grand scheme of things. It was fine.

…

Things were not fine and this was basically the tragic derailing of all current plans, schemes, and plots. Fuming in a basic interrogation room – complete with table, chairs, and a one-way mirror – Sakura held an already blood-soaked wad of fabric to her broken nose, left arm limp in a sling across her chest. She was fairly sure that the blood had stopped at this point but was also sure that the hanky was stuck to the dried blood on her face and Sakura just didn’t have the strength to deal with that right now.

Abruptly, the door slammed open and the most overworked chunin of all the greater shinobi nations slouched into the room. Personally, he would rather be doing literally anything else right now than talking to some uppity genin captain about an internal squad conflict but since he’d pissed off the boss last month, all he ever seemed to do now was talk to dumb genin-corps fuck-ups and deal with the fallout. Glancing up from his file to the moronic captain to see what he was dealing with, Nara Akio did an almost comical double-take between his file and the literal infant at the table.

“What the shit, kid? I thought the academy stopped turning out early graduates since all y’all fucks tend to attempt murder—” Honestly. What was the academy thinking? Also when did he miss hearing about a new up and comer? Sure, she was a genin, but the kid was already captaining multi-squad corps missions? What the fuck, the brass probably kept her out of the promotions for the last few years since the whole Uchiha thing. Probably smart… if she did end up being a bad egg then she at least wouldn’t be a well-known egg.

“…. I graduated fifteen days ago, sir,” Sakura pulled the rag from her nose (ow) to answer her superior. She was going to make the most of this and be as professional as possible, dammit.

Akio dropped into the chair across from her looking a little bewildered. He opened his mouth to speak, paused, and then held up a finger asking for a moment. Going back to his files, he quickly flipped to the personnel section at the back – taking a closer look this time. Six genin assigned a multi-day mission to clean up that old bath house in the Uzushio District. The first five days had gone well until the sixth had somehow led to a flooding of the lower ward, a brawl, and an attempted murder of the nephew of the Hyuuga clan head.

Quickly reading through the basic notes, he made a mental check list of what he knew. Six kids, the last Uchiha, the Uzumaki brat, this kid the captain, that mini Gai, knife girl, and Hyuuga boy. And a dog. Apparently. He glanced back up at the girl who seemed to be completely focused on seeming as harmless as possible regardless of the mangled state she was currently in. What the actual holy fuck was going on and how did anyone get through the bureaucratic nonsense in less than twelve days to become a ranking captain?

“Alright, kid, name’s Nara Akio. I gotta deal with this mess and you need to walk me through
everything that happened. Starting with why the hell we have flooding during the dry season and how come you tried to murder an underling. Ready? Go.”

“Um. Well... Sir, it started out because…” Sakura paused, unsteady because she was being accused of attempted murder now? She thought this was going to be an assault charge at worse. Or even a demerit on file! This was nothing compared to what she heard older ninja got up to! Glancing about the empty room for hope, the only thing Sakura found were the unyielding tired eyes of her interrogator.

Oh dear god, they would throw her to the chair or something if she didn’t answer quick!

Taking a deep breath, Sakura Haruno, age 12 and genin of the hidden leaf, dredged up everything the academy had ever taught about giving post mission reports and locked down on her nerves. Just like giving a presentation in class. She’s got this.

“Sir, at oh-eight hundred, Team 7 and squad Gai met up to continue the clean up and restoration mission of the bathhouse. We had been working together for five days, not counting our previous mission together, so we continued our working relationship as previously established. Pakkun-sensei, Kaka-sensei’s ninken was unable to accompany us today because of contract commitments so it was left to my discretion, as the ranking member, to organize the day’s work.”

Sakura paused to take another deep breath because that was the easiest part. Akio waved his hand for her to continue.

“Today was the final scrub down before installing new appliances and we split ourselves up to carry out different tasks. Because of his cast Sasuke-ku- uh.. Uchiha Sasuke had to stay away from most water based cleaning and was sent with Tenten to confirm the deliveries, Uzumaki Naruto and Rock Lee had to do the final scrub down of the baths, while Hyuuga Neji and I went into the kitchens and boiler rooms…. The day proceeded as planned when I, and Hyuuga-san, noticed that the tiles weren’t drying out. It came to our attention that there seemed to be water seeping up through the grouting and into the rooms. Um…”

Another pause mostly because Sakura wasn’t sure how to explain this part without sounding like a complete dumbass.

Akio did not take pity on her and shot her with a leading question. “And why was the water coming through the grout exactly and how come it took hours for anyone to be notified?”

Deep breath, girl. Deep breaths! “Because we thought we could fix it ourselves…”

“And how did that turn out for you?”

That was just mean… Sakura huffed before remembering she needed to be professional. Schooling her face, she continued as if Akio hadn’t asked.

“It turned out that the bath house was built over a natural spring. There used to be seals containing the water and directing it into the pipes but they were damaged and… removed during cleaning. The final seal broke while Hyuuga-san and I were working on it. It began flooding. Hyuuga-san and I tried to stop it with our basic seal-work and when that didn’t help we started… brainstorming about the situation.”

That was the most diplomatic way to say they started flinging accusations at each other along with name-calling.

“The water was about 6 inches deep at that point when… a rat swam out of the storage room and
between us."

“A rat?”

“Yes, sir.”

“… Right. And why mention the rat?”

“Well…. Hyuuga-san grabbed the rat and told me that since I had let a rat slip by then what else had I let happen to the building… and that the flooding was my fault personally and as captain…”

“He. Touched the rat. With his bare hands.”

“Yes, sir. And then I told him that it’s not the fault of the captain when those at your command aren’t reliable. And. Maybe it was. More colorful than that… But um he threw the rat at me. Which! Animal cruelty isn’t something to be taken lightly!”

At this point Akio had his face in his hands. What the actual literal steaming shit.

“So I retaliated. To defend the rat because animal cruelty! And during the scuffle um…. Yeah. It. Wasn’t great. And then the rest of the team showed up and the building flooded and we ended up here in this room so there you have it.”

Taking a deep sigh Akio wondered if he put his head down for a moment of peace if this tiny pink and bloody menace would kill him. That would be great actually. But, instead, he still had to deal with this shit first.

“Please describe the… scuffle and do not hedge the details, this is for the official record.” It wasn’t but honestly if Akio had to listen to any more of this shit he was getting the full fucking story so that he could accurately retell it later at the bar.

“Uh. Ok. After he threw the rat at me, I leapt at him which I think surprised him ‘cause he didn’t try to dodge. And then I was so mad about the rat that I didn’t even think about forms or anything and I. Grabbed his hair. It’s so long and it was right there! And I don’t think anyone has ever done that to Hyuuga-san before but umm he started to fight back and hit me in the side before trying to throw me off.” Frustrated with the entire situation, Sakura started gesturing as she retold the tale. Honestly, where did that pretentious clan kid think he was getting off throwing a rat at her?!

The bloody rag was stuck to her hand now and waved like a victory flag over a war zone.

“I managed to get a hold on him and then I was still holding onto his hair but his arm was around me and he was hitting me and I bit him. Uh, I bit his arm, I mean. And then he was hitting me in the shoulder and my arm went numb and he threw me off and I hit my face on the counter on the way down.”

Because who didn’t make it out of the academy or, hell, childhood without a good old fashion hair-pulling. Or a bite or two. It was pretty standard stuff. And since Sakura had no idea what she was doing and that definitely did not come out of the “Good little Ninja Playbook,” Neji had even less of a clue what she was doing and didn’t react quickly and then went a little overboard closing her tenketsu.

“But umm when you have a big chunk of hair sometimes it. Doesn’t always rip out? So when he threw me, he fell too and must have hit his head on the same counter but it was worse and he landed on me but I thought he was trying to pin me? And it scared me sir so I head-butted him and got away but he didn’t get back up… And the water was getting deeper and I didn’t know what to do when
Naruto and Lee ran down and Lee grabbed Hyuuga-san and he was really hurt and almost drowned ‘cause he got knocked out and we preformed emergency first-aid before taking him to the nearest hospital.” Like a good captain Sakura is here! …Even though she caused it.

“There we first made sure that our teammate was receiving proper care before alerting anyone about the building, although Uchiha Sasuke and Tenten had already done that. And then I was escorted here.”

Sakura spreads her available hand in an “and here we are” kind of gesture which Akio copies as if he can’t help himself. This was literally the dumbest thing he’d ever, ever heard. Oh god they were going to buy him so many rounds tonight. Bless.

“So. To summarize, your squad met up and started working, did the job a little too well, a rat, and then you had to take a teammate to the emergency room ‘cause you pulled his hair?”

Folding his hands as if praying Akio takes a deep breath before pointing at the girl.

“Didn’t this happen last week to your team?”

Sakura flushes a bright red under the blood. Her nose throbs a bit as she whips her head down to hide under her bangs. It would have worked if her hair wasn’t practically plastered to her forehead by way of dried gore.

After all she did to make sure her team had some hope of surviving. Running with the wolves, paperwork, saving Naruto from himself and Sasuke, paperwork, researching manga tropes when she should have been doing paperwork, asking the scary shark toothed librarian for help submitting documents and turning over a third of her current mission pay for the effort, dealing with teenage boys…. All of it thrown to the wind ‘cause Sakura forgot how to fight like a proper shinobi and grabbed some hair and won. Somehow.

Before she can speak up in her defense, Akio sighs again.

“So. This is the dumbest internal shit but whatever, we have to deal with it. First, your team and team Gai have to finish the mission minus pay for the damages you caused. Second, yours and Huyuga Neji’s medical bills are being docked from your pay. Third, Huyuga Neji is going to receive a demerit for insubordination while you get one for assaulting a Konoha nin. Got it?”

Sakura, already doing mental math to figure out the cost of all this, makes a faint wheezing noise Akio takes for a yes. As he gets up to leave, the kid drops face down onto the table and the wheeze becomes a whine of pain for her nose.

“Also,” calls Akio as he steps through the door, “you need to submit a formal review of the incident as captain and report to the corps HQ by the end of business today… which is in 20 minutes. Peace out, kid, don’t murder anyone.”

Letting the door swing shut, Akio grins at the faint shriek, smoothly stepping out of the way as the pink nightmare slams past two seconds later. She didn’t need to make any sort of report officially but it would save him the time and effort of having to do it himself. Time to clock out.

Sakura, meanwhile, manages to hand in a very crumpled, slightly bloody one-page report written on the back of a business card that reads “Team 7 + Team Gai on mission, mission setback, cap + HN fight, mission postponed investigation + medical, will continue.”
She slams it onto the desk of a snoozing paper nin who cracks a single eye open to get a good look at whatever nonsense just showed up. Getting a solid eyeful of a broken nose and faintly crazed look of panic, the paper nin closes his eye and tells the kid to take a number and have a seat. He’ll deal with this never. Break first. Scary children with bad paperwork skills could wait.

Chapter End Notes

AAAAHHHHHH a new chapter and I'm changing it up!!! if you are vaguely imagining the bathhouse from spirited away. thats exactly what this bs looks like lol entirely sakura centric chapter butttttttttttttttt i thought this would be a hilarious way to tell it also Akio means 'bright boy' and if that aint the most hilarious name for a nara then idk what to tell ya... also i wonder what pakkun was getting up to with the pack instead of herding children

THANK YOU FOR ALL THE SUPPORT IT MEANS THE WORLD TO ME!!!!!!!!!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The mission had been a complete cluster-fuck from the start. First of all, it was written somewhere in the handbook to never accept a mission with a head cold. And second, it was written in the rules of all that is ironic and awful that if you do go on a mission with a head cold, you will sneeze at the absolute worse possible moment (a.k.a.: while slitting the throat of a short, fat gangster right under the nose of a bunch of actual fucking A-listers straight outa Mist).

Long story short, the mission that should have taken oh…. four days tops took just over two fucking months and Kakashi, who wasn’t actually sick anymore (thanks creepy witch lady Gai saved from a ditch) was now just sick and tired of being away from home and not-cuddling his dogs.

Was it too much to ask for? He wanted some quality time in his bed and not remotely in the vicinity of Gai and Genma – the two biggest fools, just after himself, for going on this mission. A deep, deep sigh was all Kakashi allowed the outside world to see of his internal plight.

Debriefing had gone as expected, though there was a strange comment by one of the desknin about checking in with payroll sometime in the next few days. Whatever, he’d deal with that nonsense when it was actually relevant.

(Finding out later that his teaching stipend had been cut by half was an outrage. He literally did not get paid enough for this. Since apparently his team had fucked up so tremendously all of his mission pay for the ninken was docked for fucking repairs and medical bills.)

On his way home Kakashi paused at a minor convenience shop, ducking in quickly to buy a map. Gleefully he opened it up on the checkout counter to the absolute annoyance of the cashier and snatched a pen off the register. Aggressively circling the most recent update, Kakashi happily wrote a nasty little note and signed off with the henohenomoheji. A glance around found a busy messenger nin and a small tip had the kid bounding off with the refolded map – note and circle now front and center. (Genma who had gone home to sleep off the fact he accidentally got a bridge named after himself was about to get a sweet little note reminding him of that fact.)

“Don’t like that bridge, huh, man? I feel ya ’m not a big fan of that one near the training fields you know? It’s like. Always out of commission or destroyed or some teams secret meeting spot or whatever… like I just want to walk home but nooooo gotta take the long way…..”

The cashier continued like this for the next four customers without a care that none of them paid the slightest bit of attention or that Kakashi had ditched before they had even started speaking.

Finally, at home Kakashi mentally prepared himself for the absolutely fantastic welcome the pack was about to give him. He had to play it cool. Don’t let them know he missed them. Act like the big strong shinobi he is. Accept all the licks with great reserve. Calm and cool, man, calm and cool.

He flung open the door and pranced in, calling out a happy “I’m home~” only to pause and wait for the adoring puppies to bombard him. The pause continued for an awkward amount of time before Kakashi determined that his dogs weren’t actually home at 3 in the morning and were in fact not about to welcome him from his long and grueling awful mission.

What the shit.
This was unforgivable. Also the power to his apartment had been turned off, a few feeble attempts at the light switch proved it wasn’t just a burnt out bulb. Also the AC wasn’t on the lowest it could possibly go which made the apartment humid and stuffy. Possibly why the dogs weren’t there currently.

Putting his remarkable ninja skills to use he set off to remedy his lack of welcome immediately. Tracking the dogs when they didn’t want to be found was next to impossible but Kakashi was an excellent sneaky shinobi and knew that he could basically reverse-summon himself to the dogs on the other end of the contract. This is, of course, extremely theoretical and since Kakashi read that proposed theory when he was 10 and just learning to contract, he didn’t know about the extensive research into the field of reverse-summoning.

Nor that the current science being a solid ‘probably shouldn’t try this outside a lab setting and with extreme safety precautions including a medic on standby.’

Kakashi went ahead and reverse-summoned himself straight into a pink wall and was nearly decapitated while half phasing from the summon and into a stud beam. Crashing but not yet burning, Kakashi left a vaguely him-shaped hole in the wall and turned around to find his dogs. And apparently his pink student, on her pink bed, in her pink room. The awkward silence was worse than his lack of welcome at home and honestly, Kakashi was rethinking his plan and should have just gone to bed. He faintly noticed the distant hum of an expensive AC unit… no wonder Kakashi’s dogs had vacated to a better housing arraignment. (Kakashi didn’t know this but supposedly Sakura’s parents had figured out how to get a fully functional brand spanking new unit for their townhouse paid for by the KOPs no less. Both Sakura and the dogs were very happy with this arraignment.)

The dogs, living up to their nature, shook of the surprise at their masters return and leapt at him in delight. Sakura franticly shushed the animals as she lunged from her bed to the desk and then to the door slapping what appeared to be a fairly advanced and extremely meticulous silencing seal to the frame. Those cost a pretty penny and Kakashi was fairy sure that rank genin shouldn’t be able to afford that on mission pay.

Still faintly mystified (and sleep deprived), Kakashi watched Sakura watch him pet his dogs. She opened her mouth to speak then closed it again without making a sound. Stepping over the dogs she made her way, slower this time, back to the desk and found a pile of paperwork and shuffled through it for a second. Holding out a few papers, complete with little sticky arrows, Kakashi took the papers from her with the hand not covered in dog drool. Polite, that was.

“Uhm. Hi, Kaka-sensei I’m glad you’re back! Pakkun said you should sign these as soon as possible, it’s for mission stuff…” Sakura made sure to maintain eye contact even as Bull abandoned Kakashi and made his way to the girl’s side to lean against her (or was it the other way around?).

“Yeah, boss. This shit is actually holding everyone up from getting shit done.” Pakkun was a solid voice of reason, thought Kakashi as he signed away. Kind of like a conscience in dog form. A little and beautiful pug-shaped angle on his shoulder or something.

He signed the papers without reading them and then held onto them without giving them back. Sakura, unsure how to deal with this extremely mellow Kakashi, tugged the papers out of his hand and carefully filed them away before hiding that file in the depths of her desk underneath the embarrassing love letters never to be sent and other awful awful things her eleven-year-old self had written. Turning back to her suddenly no longer absent sensei, she blinked at the pile of grown man and dogs on her bright pink throw rug.

She eyed him for a long moment while idly scratching Bull’s ears. Pakkun wriggled slightly out of
the sudden sleep cuddle and sent a doggy wink Sakura’s way before settling. Kakashi would deny passing out in his little student’s room till his dying day and maintained he was completely aware the entire time but the truth was Sakura had taken one long gander at what was going on and set out to organize the house into emergency sensei arrival. She tiptoed around, moving pictures and shifting certain family heirlooms out of prominence. Like the daisho in her closet or the formal qípáo near the window. Sakura also snuck another form under Kakashi’s hand while Pakkun assisted in getting him to sign it.

Grinning, Sakura dove for her hidden file and snuck out of her room and away from the snoring shinobi. Bull lumbered along after her as she trekked across the village. Currently, Sasuke was probably awake and Naruto was probably crashing on his floor and hiding from his landlord. Sakura had plans for Naruto’s currently probably vacated and ex-evicted apartment. And it was not for Naruto to live there. Oh no. Not anymore.

Pounding on the door twice, Sakura let herself in with the key she’d swiped from Naruto last week. She felt kinda bad about it when Sasuke flipped his shit at Naruto for letting it go missing but honestly if Sasuke was so worried about people sneaking in he should have just changed the locks, not given Naruto a new key. Also, she saw straight through that whole nonsense about games and magic girls and what-fucking-evers. They were definitely having a permeant sleepover thing happening and Sakura wanted in.

During the month following Naruto’s sudden eviction and then move-back-in to the same apartment, his lease had fallen through once more and though it had been re-instated fairly quickly, Naruto and Sasuke had decided that rooming together was the better part of valor when faced with Sakura on a paperwork rampage. It left the leased studio apartment empty most of the time which was slowly being repurposed as the team hangout and Sakura’s office. Of course she never left anything important in that building – all files worthy of secreting away got hidden under awful preteen love letters.

Invading the apartment of two boys armed with knives typically wasn’t a great idea but Sakura was also armed with knives, plus she had a big dog with her who had teeth, which was like even more knives than both boys combined. Either way, she politely removed her shoes and looked for house slippers (there weren’t any) while Sasuke burst out of his room ready for a fight to the death. Naruto, in his slightly used pre-owned sleeping bag, sat up and smacked his head on the table he managed to wriggle under.

“We have a mission. Kakashi is back and we have to get this filed before he wakes up.”

“Sa…kura? It’s the middle of the night, Sasuke needs his beauty sleep… come back tomorrow.” Naruto managed to say all of that while rolling out from under the table and burrito-ing himself farther into the bag. Sasuke nodded, not letting go of his knives – Sakura on a mission in the middle of the night seemed dangerous and the stack of paperwork in her arms meant, well... Paperwork, which was a nightmare and sometimes involved shark teeth.

She huffed and bulldozed the blond out of his bag and both of the boys out on the streets in a matter of minutes. Bull sat back and enjoyed the show. It wasn’t that the paperwork had to go to different buildings but that the paperwork had to go to separate divisions and floors and rooms and some of the more important parts required a ridiculous amount of line-waiting. Frustrating that they couldn’t just leave the forms in an overnight drop bin, but that was shinobi village paranoia for you. Plus, a solid dose of bureaucracy.

Sakura led the charge to the Hokage tower at a brisk trot across the tops of the buildings. Naruto and Sasuke (who had both finally managed chakra climbing) followed behind, albeit unsteadily due to
the time.

All in all, the kids manage to get all their brand new completed paperwork filed with enough time to pretend they hadn’t been running around for most of the night and scurry home to freshen up and eat some food. Sasuke and Naruto had a minor scuffle over leftovers and a damaged microwave while Sakura took a quick look-in at the happenings of her home.

Her parents left for work already and Kakashi was still snoozing on her floor with the dogs. She nodded decisively to herself and made enough food to feed an entire army and left a tray in front of Kakshi’s nose. The pack happily ate their offerings and followed Sakura out the door on the daily run of hell (now increased to running next to the stairs with chakra).

Kakashi woke up about two hours later to cold food and the vague opinion that pink is an awful color to see so early in the morning. Also that he could probably forgive the pack for the tortuous move if they found him a hidey hole in a closet or something, the air worked phenomenally here.

By the time Kakashi meanders his way to the team of gremlins, he was vaguely aware of a couple of things that completely passed him by in the night. Mainly the patrol chunnin kept giving Kakashi nasty looks far more aggressive than the normal nasty looks. And second, the lower ward apparently got a solid scrubbing and shone like precious jewels from the capitol.

In yet another monumentally awkward moment, Kakashi has the distinctly terrible experience of appearing in the middle of the corps-genin assignment office. While the entire room was filled to the gills with the mid morning shift. He stood there for a moment before tossing a casual “yo” and a peace sign before kicking someone out of the chair next to Naruto. His team was giving some serious side eye but it didn’t matter because in that same moment Kakashi realized that Gai was also awkwardly sitting in a chair next to his team twiddling his thumbs across the room.

Shifting slightly and suddenly content to watch the show, Kakashi motions for the corps commander to continue. While the entire room was filled to the gills with the mid morning shift. He stood there for a moment before tossing a casual “yo” and a peace sign before kicking someone out of the chair next to Naruto. His team was giving some serious side eye but it didn’t matter because in that same moment Kakashi realized that Gai was also awkwardly sitting in a chair next to his team twiddling his thumbs across the room.

“Team Seven, Team Gai, Inuzuka Vet clinic. Haruno don’t let your team end up in the hospital again.”

Abruptly checking back into reality Kakashi peers down the row at his pink student (truly an awful color for a ninja) standing to accept the tossed mission scroll.

“Team Gai wishes to formally withdraw their participation in this mission due to… unavoidable differences in the field,” the Hyuuga boy cuts in shooting up out of his chair to the embarrassment of his teammates. He stood tall and correct, clothing stretched neatly not a single extra scrap of cloth to be seen, hair tucked up into a professional bun at the back of his head, the sight of an absolutely by-the-book regulation genin with nothing loose and grabable.

Gai has a faint look of panic at such unyouthfulness of a student while the girl and mini Gai seem to physically pull as far away from their teammate as possible without moving.

Naruto hisses like a feral cat and Sasuke also… hisses like a cat? It’s quieter and might have just been an aggressive exhale but… no, Kakashi is pretty sure it was a hiss.

Sakura hardly glances over her shoulder at the boy before addressing the corps officer.

“Sir, according to section 8 subsection II in regards to team assignments unavoidable differences in
the field actually require the field in order to be used. As our team is assigned a simple D rank within the confines of the village proper, not the field which is traditionally used for missions exceeding the rank of C or outside the village, Hyuuga-san’s complaint is null.”

Pinching the bridge of her nose, the commanding officer doesn’t even sigh. She just sits there for a complete and solid minute before asking the room at large, “Any other team assignment bullshit?”

There’s silence as the girl on Gai’s team reaches over and yanks her teammate back into his seat.

“No? Great. Haruno get your team out of here before I dock your pay again.”

That was at least the third time Kakashi had a pay cut referenced in some way and it was starting to be worrisome. Mayhap he should take a quick peak into the payroll office. As soon as possible. He was a pretty laid back kinda guy but no one was chill when it came to fuckery with the money.

In the hallway Gai was on the verge of tears, unable or unwilling to let his emotions get the best of him. His team circles around him, quiet and humbled. Theoretically at least.

Naruto breaks up the circle and the silence by taking a flying leap at Neji, intent on giving him a noogie from hell. He’s dodged but that doesn’t stop the sudden and non-stop tirade he’s spewing.

“Better luck next time, Neji-ineffective. Every single time! Every time you try and try and boy damn you suck.”

The look of disgust on Neji’s face was more practiced than expected and uniquely designed to sneer at Naruto specifically.

“Eventually you’re gonna have said the entire uh- handbook or shit and the look ‘n scary lady’s face today. HA she’s gonna beat the shit outa you maybe I dunno but dude you sure are look’n for a beat’n always going on about how you can’t go ‘n a mission with us just ‘cause you got beat up by Sakura-chan.”

Naruto is waving at Sakura as he lunges again at Neji who ducks behind the bulk of his baffled and teary teacher.

“It’s okay, Sakura-chan is Sakura-chan an’ she hits really hard so no one really thinks bad of ya. Don’t be embarrassed, it’s ok. Well maybe a little bit cause ya know ya got your ass kicked by a-a, ah uhm by uh. Yeah.”

There’s a fugitive glance at Sakura’s threatening fist by the end of it that has Naruto trailing off and not ending the rant with ‘by a girl.’ Smart of him.

None of this was answering the question though of what the hell is actually going on.

Eye contact achieved with Gai Kakashi came to the uncomfortable realization that this was possibly his fault. Maybe. The kids had scattered with Naruto was still harassing Neji and Sasuke had towed himself along for the ride to needle at both boys. Sakura, Tenten, and Lee had shuffled away to look over the mission scroll and Gai was vaguely attempting to sink into a pit of depression.

Guess it was up to Kakashi to work this nonsense out. Reaching out, he grabbed Naruto by the scruff and hauled the kid in. A soft shake like the brat was a puppy had him chilling out enough to stop screeching. Next, he loomed ominously at Sakura (who didn’t even bat an eye? Rude. The other kiddos flinched which was a little satisfying.).

“Explain.” Straightforward enough.
“We have a mission? And Neji has been trying for weeks to get out of working-“

“With you, you brute!”

“-and that’s it. Also we should probably head over ‘cause I think we have to do pest control and that’s way easier in the day when you can actually see…”

…Alright it wasn’t straightforward but he’d allow it.

Finally, Gai just couldn’t take it anymore and all of his feelings leapt out in a single wordless wail. There was a beat before the words actually made an appearance. So did the tears.

“My young and impressionable students! I didn’t mean to leave you alone for so long unguided! I see now it was my mistake! Young Neji don’t worry we will root out the issue and FIX IT!”

Unable to dodge a grown jounin, Neji was swept up into a breathtaking (literally, the poor kid’s ribs) hug. Naruto was still dangling from Kakashi’s fist and in that moment was eternally grateful not to have that dude as a sensei cause the hug seemed to remind Kaka-sensei that Naruto was closer than appreciated and was hurriedly dropped.

“Do not fret, my young students! We shall, from now on! Strive to display youthfulness in our every action! Our team will stand above the rest! But first! Neji we must right a wrong! Please! Apologize to your temporary teammates!”

The white-eyed boy (more like wide-eyed) was placed directly in front of Sakura and held firmly in place by Gai’s hands upon his shoulders. There was a slow grin stretching across Sakura’s face and Tenten sent her a faint glance of amusement.

It was not Neji who spoke after an awkward amount of time had passed (what was with those today?) and no apology was issued, but instead it was Lee, who stepped up and took one for the team.

“Sensei! Don’t worry! We are all making progress! Neji is just using this as a means to explore the intricacies of our life! He is working to righting his loss at the hands of Captain Sakura! Who is my eternal rival since her take down of Neji – my previous rival!” Clenched fist and all the fires of youth and righteousness burned in the kids eyes.

The speech sent Gai for a tailspin, a mistake that had him loosening his grip on the Hyuuga who lunged at the pink haired girl tossing her hair spectacularly at the mention of the win (??!). In a matter of seconds Sakura whipped out a knife, Neji was scruffed by his giant green sensei and yanked back, while the other four kids let out various yells of encouragement for a fight.

The entire thing was cut off as a door down the hall slammed open and an overworked Nara stuck his head out to shout at them.

“Haruno! If you don’t cut that shit out- oh. Kakashi, Gai, you’re back. Get your students sorted before I cut the rest of your pay for the month. And Haruno, you best be getting gone before your team gets another citation. Scat.” Vague shoo-ing motion as Akio disappeared back behind the door.

Kakashi really, really wished he had just gone straight to bed last night.

Also what the fuck was with this Captain Sakura nonsense?
The mission was bafflingly horrifying. Both teams worked well together and for some reason Sakura was the one who seems to have the authority among both groups. Captain Sakura? No one fessed up to what that’s about but all of the boys seem to have a healthy amount of respect for the idea. Despite Neji taking every single opportunity to verbally undermine the girl.

Tenten only grins a secret girl grin at Sakura and sneakily whispers ideas into her ear. Which led to an embarrassing moment where Lee and Naruto both attempt to scrub a litter box that really should have gone straight into the trash years ago.

There did, in fact, end up being a minor pest control issue. Mostly of the insect variety, but the mission itself centered around the cleaning of an unused kennel. The Inuzuka had bared some pointy teeth and pointed at the building without a word while the genin squad had trudged through the muck leading to the entrance. As if they had known exactly what to do (which this was the fifth clean up mission so yeah they did know what to do by this point).

Of course the brief interruption of Sakura lunging for a rat with a howl reminiscent of hound was perplexing. The fact that she managed to grab it and gut it with her bare hands was impressive even if Kakashi had to help her to a spigot to wash off the tiny guts. She had mumbled something in passing about it being the wrong one but Kakashi was suddenly very busy reshuffling the other kids back to work to pay her much attention.

When the mission was over, impressively quickly considering, Kakashi stole his team away to run them through some exercises to see how they had progressed under Pakkun’s guidance. (The pug hadn’t once shown his face since the morning run and Kakashi wasn’t sure where any of the dogs had gotten off to.)

A quick spar had been just as baffling as the mission honestly. Sakura had been quick to whip out a knife and just as fast to lose it and try to sink her teeth into Kakashi’s arm when weaponry proved ineffective. It was reminiscent of a dog and had Kakashi alarmed at the implications of the fight. Instinctively grabbing her scruff (seemed to be the theme of the day) Kakashi gave her a shake before tossing her head over heels into a bush.

A gesture at Sasuke had the boy lunging for Kakashi’s throat right out the gate. Slightly more impressive Sasuke managed to keep his forms classic-Uchiha and didn’t pull a knife until the end when Kakashi purposely left an opening to see what would happen. Snatching the knife straight out of his hand left Sasuke scrambling before Kakashi quite literally booted him in the same direction as Sakura. (He landed on the girl and there was a solid moment of terror for the boy and delight from the girl before embarrassment on both ends equaled out into fury at their sensei.)

Naruto didn’t even wait for a signal and just leapt and clone piled Kakashi which resulted in mass confusion for the boy and a smack to the back of the head. A huge puff of smoke later and the original Naruto lay in a heap disoriented and dizzy from the blow and subsequent clone dispersal.

Peering student to student, Kakashi came to the uncomfortable realization that he had left a trio of impressionable baby assassins under the guidance of assassin dogs for two months and that had left more of a mark than anything else recently in their short little lives. And instead of one completely feral child and two slightly tame but clearly unhinged children, he now had three horrifying child-puppy-ninjas to train up and train out of bad habits before the rest of the village found out about it.

The rest of the village knew about it. And knew more than Kakashi about it actually. And clued Kakashi in at a stop by payroll at the end of the day which lead to the most bewildering paperwork experience of Kakashi’s life (maybe).

Sakura was actually a captain now. The whole team was facing citations and demerits and pay cuts.
Also he had to pick which one to apprentice before the village decided for him since three official apprentices wasn’t allowed. What a joke, Naruto’s application had been rejected out of hand since his future apprenticeship had been spoken for since birth and Sasuke’s was currently suspended for some reason. Which left Sakura as the only current and viable option… also he had signed the official documentation in triplicate and managed to file it without even knowing about the applications so there was that.

By the time he wandered home Kakashi was even more rung out. Feeling waifish and exhausted, he opened the door expecting his pack to welcome him home for real this time. Only to find his power still off and no pack to be seen.

Right, it was time to deal with this shit fest and, first and foremost, it looked like his apprentice (fuck that noise) needed a bit of a wakeup call.

Chapter End Notes

I'm aliveeeeeeeeee
ok but actually this summer has been insane and just wow I'm so ready for it to be over

I hope u enjoy this chapter! pls comment *whispers* it fuels my writing and my soul
Encountering Hyuuga Neji in the wild was a lot of things but pleasant wasn’t one of them. Sakura was just short of full on galloping around the corner of the library into the small alley way next to it when she slammed face first into the boy. Like a comedy act they bounced off one another and had a brief and hurried apology that died like oxygen in a fire when they recognized each other.

Neji drew himself up to his full height (not even two inches taller then Sakura the shrimp) to sneer down his nose at the girl.

“You.” It was spat as if the direst of insults and Sakura raised an eyebrow in a ‘that all you got?’ kinda way. She’d heard worse when she was five.

“Me.” Oh well best to play it his way.

The preteens stared one another down in silence waiting for the other to crack first. Neji, of course, had plenty of practice at this seeing as he was the nephew of the current Hyuuga head, and hated about 99% of all his blood relations. Making dinner awkward was both a skill and a talent and it started with having creepy white eyes (granted when everyone at the table had the same eyes it gave you less to start but there was still an edge). Sakura on the other hand was a preteen girl who had been fighting with civilian and street kids since people started to notice her pink hair and forehead. She might have been a wuss before Ino but damn if she couldn’t hold her own now in this arena.

She’d also recently kicked Neji’s ass and he was still extremely sore over the whole thing. So he cracked first (loser).

“Finding more small animals to murder? Clearly you’re the type. The village should know better then to train civilian stragglers.”

Sakura scoffed at the boy. First of all, he was the one who hurt the first rat and second he clearly had no idea what he was talking about with the village training civilian kids. A solid 72.3% of the active shinobi force was descended within three generations of civilians. Its how Konoha kept its ranks full while the famous clan ninja got murdered before they could have babies.

Since his words had about zero effect on the pink girl, Neji decided to step his game up. By a lot.

“You are going to die. It’s the fate of any shinobi of your… background. The village doesn’t care about you, you’re just a body to fill the gap in the system. Placed on a team that outstrips you so much,” Neji noticing he seemed to be getting through to the girl took a step closer to her to maximize his two-inch height difference, “its like you aren’t even there.”

“Just fodder to die on the battlefield. Hopefully it’ll be honorable and in the place of a teammate. Since you don’t seem to ever contribute anything worthwhile to them.” Neji punctuated it with a harsh shove as he shouldered past the trembling girl.

Now Neji knew deep down that he was out of line but he didn’t care in that moment. He had just spent the last few hours fruitlessly searching for forms or files or anything that could stop the multi-squad missions with Team 7. Nothing had turned up and clearly the librarian was no help, just demanding his name and registration and not even confirming it the hack. So he left frustrated and angry and had run directly into the cause of it all.
So caught up in his own personal tragedy and impressed at the venom he had managed to spew at enemy number 1, Neji did not register the wordless shriek as the warning it was. So when Sakura bodily slammed Neji to the ground he barely managed to slap his hands out and catch himself from a full faceplant.

Flipping around to fight back he could faintly make out what the girl was screaming

“So are y… worthless to… -ryone, clan, village… no prestige…. No name team… nothing!” Neji might have only caught every other word but it was enough to get the picture across and enough to ignite the bonfire of rage that had been steadily building in his soul for weeks.

Sakura who was all anger and rage and fury and frustration had no qualms grappling a clan kid to the ground, again, and fighting street kid style. Which meant hair pulling, clothing ripping, teeth, yanking out a piercing or two was all fair game. Neji, who hated Sakura, had no qualms disregarding all the rules of sparing and fighting fellow ninja and pulled a knife on the girl intent on stabbing her at least once.

They rolled around on the ground trying to get the upper hand yelling and howling and furious. Neji sunk his kuni into the meat of Sakura’s leg while she managed to grab a decently sized rock which she used to smash his hand.

Pulling away from one another in pain Sakura yanked the knife out of her thigh (it was only a flesh wound, it was only a flesh wound, oh holy shit there was a lot of blood, tis but a scratch, oh shit oh shit) while Neji protectively cradled his hand.

She threw the blade at the boy sitting about three feet away and the awkward angle left the trajectory wobbly and weak. Still Neji instinctively swatted it away neatly slicing his own hand open in the process. Horrified by the sight of two damaged hands, his main weapon as a Hyuuga, Neji unthinkingly attacked the girl currently under the impression the rules of the game was thug fighting not assassins. Essentially that the fight was over once it hurt enough, not the fight was over when one or both was dead.

Slamming Sakura into the ground he grappled for a solid hold that would keep her still. Pulling his bloody hand away Neji ignored her screaming into the dirt as he grabbed the knife. Sitting on top of her he managed to have just enough weight to keep her still while his crushed hand grabbed a chunk of hair. Sawing at it Neji pulled the first large lock away and abruptly came back to himself and realized what he was doing.

The hair fluttered out of his hand to the ground, bright and pink and incriminating and when Sakura saw it she went ballistic. Twisting and writhing like a rabid raccoon Sakura managed to flip the tables (she also smacked the back of her head into Neji’s jaw which helped). Tit for tat Sakura didn’t even go for the dirty knife she just blindly grabbed the bun of hair and hauled the Hyuuga in close so he could get a good look at her face.

Neji, shamed and horrified that he could have forgotten himself so much as to blindly assault a rookie genin didn’t even blink.

Dirty and bloody with un-even hair Sakura, in a move more ritualistic then menacing, pulled a clean new kuni from her pouch and brought it up to Neji’s head. In a solid clean sweep, she chopped off everything minus the bit of fringe around the headband.

“What the fuck is going on?”

Standing in the mouth of the alley was an unfamiliar jounin holding a bag of pastries. He honestly
didn’t care that much, but also wanted to know what prompted two kids to go from attempted murder to a weird hair cutting ritual thing. He’d been standing there eating a crêpe since the first body slam.

Jerking in shock the two kids flinched backwards, Sakura hastily stuffing both her knife and the hair into her pouch as they whipped around the face the man.

The only noise was the sound of chewing for a long moment. Finding no answer forthcoming the man rolled his eyes and swallowed. Taking a step towards them had the kids scrambled upright. Well the boy did at least. The girl swayed alarmingly half way up and had to sit back down quickly.

Frowning now and disappointed that he was going to have to deal with responsibilities the jounin strode forward to peer down at the kids from his much more impressive height. Sighing he crouched down and called up to the boy while poking at the mean looking wound in the girl’s leg.

“Hey your friend is hurt you gotta use the buddy system and take her to the hospital, little dude.”

Neji mortified and dirty and about ten other emotions he didn’t know how to deal with didn’t respond.

Sakura who was woozy from blood loss thought about letting the big dude know it was all cool she could make it on her own or maybe Pakkun-sensei would help her eventually when she didn’t turn up tonight.

The man hummed and tightened his field bandage. “Pakkun huh? As in Kakashi’s dog? How about I’ll just help you right now instead of waiting for that guy to turn up.”

Oh Sakura hadn’t realized she’d said that bit out loud.

“Yep sure did, kid. Don’t worry ol’ Genma will get you to the hospital right quick.”

Standing Genma swung the kid up and over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry. She didn’t really weigh enough to justify it but Genma was very aware that little baby genin had a lot of pride and a princess carry probably wasn’t something she wanted or needed right now. The boy, Genma shoved his bag of pastries at and told to follow and not to eat his food or else.

Neji nodded gravely and cradled the bag and his injured hand gently to his chest.

First thing Sakura noticed when she came to was how great she felt. Second thing she noticed was how awful she felt. There wasn’t any sort of in-between when doped up on painkillers after getting patched up. Her leg ached in a far off distant pain that was obvious and alarming when she focused but not something the meds let her think too long or hard about.

Her leg had been healed in its entirety, that sort of damage could have lasting effects on the career of any shinobi and was treated quickly and thoroughly as possible. It also helped that a jounin had brought the kid in claiming it was a training accident and she needed to be ready to go stat.

(Word of the wise kiddos, if you aint at least a chunnin always bring a better adult with you to face the medics or end up in a cast for a month. Live and learn, Sakura sent her silent regrets Sasuke’s way even though he’d been out of the cast for a while now.)

Blinking at the ceiling Sakura smacked her lips a few times before registering she wasn’t alone. Sitting in a chair next to her, inexplicably holding a bag in their lap, was some kid with a bob. It wasn’t until he opened his eyes that Sakura realized she was looking at the result of her handiwork.
“Like your haircut…” That finally had Neji glaring at her, returning the world back to working order.

They sat quietly until the door opened and that medic from the time Sasuke broke his leg walked in followed by Genma. The woman was counting a wad of cash and it took a moment before she addressed Sakura directly.

“So you’re back. And this time its you with the messed up leg. Good job kiddo. We don’t need anything from you, your teammates and sensei cleared up everything.” Genma tossed a wink at the girl in the bed from behind the medic. Catching it Sakura didn’t say anything to correct the woman poking at her leg.

“We had to fix this in layers, a bit like internal stitches, so you get to stay a few hours for observation but should be right as rain by tomorrow. No excessive stretches or straining for at least a week.” Sakura nodded along, best to just nod and smile in these kinds of situations. Nod and smile.

“Anyways I’m Kobayashi Chiharu, just incase you end up back here.”

After the medic walked out Sakura asked “Sensei?” of Genma and gave an even more bemused “Teammate?” of Neji.

Neji didn’t say anything though his shoulders seem to curl in as if he was trying to simultaneously sink into the chair and maintain his perfect posture. It wasn’t a good look on him.

Genma though, he just grinned and offered up a little shrug as an explanation. Sakura who didn’t care much about paperwork or anything in that moment just accepted the non answer.

“Allright kiddos. I’m gonna head out. No more murdering each other. Or whatever. Gimme my food, no treats for murder children.” Genma snatched his bag and ruffled Neji’s hair in the same move. He also got Sakura’s while heading to the window.

Crawling out over the ledge he paused and glanced back. “Alright I guess ya’ll can have some snacks.” And tossed the bag onto the bed before vanishing from sight.

Sakura and Neji were both disappointed to find a single smushed stick of dango and nothing else.

“Kakashi! Holy fuck!” Kicking in a former ANBU’s door wasn’t the best idea but Genma had news and it was important.

It also didn’t matter cause the loser wasn’t even in his own house and for some reason the power wasn’t working. Quickly closing the door (and using some wire to hold it closed since he broke the knob) Genma set out to find Kakashi and let him in on what his student was up to.

(He didn’t find Kakashi because Kakashi was in the middle of negotiating payment for Sakura’s formal apprenticeship by the Hatake clan. It was going great – Sakura’s parents were loaded and pretty damn excited to foist the care and feeding of a kid who somehow adopted like ten dogs overnight on someone else.)

Eventually Neji and Sakura got booted out of the hospital and had an awkward moment when they realized they wouldn’t be parting at the entrance and were continuing in the same general direction.
They kept silent as they walked. Sakura kept shooting a side eye at Neji who was also giving her a side eye, he was just better equipped to do it without actually slanting his eyes at the target.

Neither said a word when two blocks later they finally split off from one another. They didn’t even give awkward waves. Just split and walked off. And as soon as the other was out of sight just full on booked it home.

Sakura shoved through the door of her parents’ house and was in the process of pulling off her shoes when she realized there was quiet voices coming from the living room. Slowly she leaned sideways to peer around the corner and get a look at whoever was in her house. Her parents didn’t notice her but Kaka-sensei sure did judging by the direct stare down from hell she got. Sitting upright she shook her head and decided this was too much on top of everything else and scampered up the stairs before her parents could call her in.

(Negotiations had taken a slight turn for the worse when all of a sudden the Haruno’s realized they were getting scammed and decided to bring their own clan affiliations into the mix. What clan you might ask? Well here’s a funny story about a long lost samurai who had a bunch of kids and one of those kids said ‘screw you, dad’ and ran off to marry a merchant’s daughter and they had a daughter who was secretly the last surviving heir and technically could swing the entire political climate of the country if she so chose. And then that last surviving heir had a daughter who decided to be a ninja when she grew up.)

(Here’s a hint: everything was a lie and Haruno Mebuki was not the long lost heir of dying samurai clan, but just like the KOP Kakashi didn’t need to know that. Despite the story not being true there absolutely were records dating back to the warring states era attesting to the legitimacy of the clan.)

In her room Sakura greeted the pack before flopping onto her bed. Pakkun uncurled from his place on her favorite pillow and lazily asked what she’d been up to.

“I got stabbed today…”

At once all of the dogs were on alert, looking for blood and ready for murder. Urushi snuffling at her hip closest to the sight of the crime looked up asking “We need to kill a boy today Sakura? We can, don’t worry no one will find a body.”

“That’s right kid. We’re experts. Why don’t you tell us what happened,” Pakkun wouldn’t openly admit to being worried but he would offer to off someone, so there’s that.

Sakura laughed lightly. “Nah its ok, I cut his hair off so I guess we are even? Oh! I think I broke his hand too.”

“Think or know?” Bull pulled himself up onto the bed and lay down along the girls left side.

“…Know. I crushed it with a rock.” She was pretty sure that had actually happened but didn’t remember seeing a cast earlier. (There hadn’t been one, mainly because Hyuuga hands were Valuable. She’d broken his hand in six places.)

“Good.” Bull punctuated the statement with a lick to the side of Sakura head that had her giggling and swatting at the massive animal.

Most of the pack figured it was settled and returned to dozing happily in the sun with their human adjacent. Pakkun though was faintly worried. It had been all of two days since Kakashi got back and already the kids were getting into trouble.

Well, granted, they always got into trouble but he wasn’t there to help mitigate it anymore. And
perhaps even more alarming; Kakashi was.

As Sakura snuggled in to take a nap Pakkun pondered over the state of Team 7 without him. There wasn’t much he, as a dog, had to offer the team other then being a dog. And that was ok. What wasn’t ok was Pakkun not being there when the team needed him. Clearly Pakkun needed to speak with Kakashi stat about this. Which reminded him to send one of dogs not snuggled in with Sakura off to get the current rundown of the negotiation.

(Kakashi was down to bargaining specific training techniques for money now.)

Shifting restlessly Pakkun eyed the girl for a second before glancing at Bull. Finding the much larger dog already looking put the pug at ease. At least they were all on the same page, made things easier in the long run. Plus, eight against one was fantastic odds.

Off in Sasuke’s apartment the boys sat at the low table facing one another. They were having a very serious discussion that would effect the entire team dynamic and it was important to hash these things out before Sakura got wind of it.

Mainly cause Sakura would find someway to turn it into a money thing. Which Naruto loved her (believe it!) for her skills in making sure the team had enough money to live but also it was slightly terrifying and sometimes Naruto wished she’d let him eat trash instead of doing another mission.

Sasuke didn’t care and had more money then god so it didn’t matter in the long run. That fact didn’t stop him from taking his cut at the end of the day all the same.

Folding his hands on the table in front of him, Naruto appraised his brother in arms. This was it, the deciding factor. They had to keep their heads and wits about them while making such a momentous decision.

“I don’t think we should give Sakura a bracelet. I mean maybe we should I dunno. But also she’d probably hit me for it and then sell it on the side of the road to the first schmuck she finds, ya know? And – and well. She’s not in the club!”

Naruto was mostly talking out his ass on this but he had a point, Sasuke had to admit. Sakura wasn’t in the club and she would sell it to the first moron to show interest. Well, if Naruto gave it to her that is. She’d definitely keep it if Sasuke handed it over. But then she’d keep it for the wrong reasons. And Sasuke wasn’t sure how he felt about that.

(Actually with the current state of the economy and Sakura’s rather destitute position as caption of a team paying out more then they earned currently she’d probably hold an auction for the Uchiha Sasuke fanclub.)

“She doesn’t get a wristband then.” Sasuke was taking a stand and that was that.

“Dude it’s a bracelet chill. Also yeah you right. She shouldn’t…” Naruto trailed off distracted by their arts and craft project. “What do u think, will the orange hide the sweat or should I go with the black? Its kinda matchy then…”

Both boys hunched back over the table to continue making arm warmers for Naruto. Summer was coming up and Sasuke was determined to find a solution to the orange jacket and if it meant sharing part of his look then so be it.

Sakura woke up the next day and realized a solid chunk of her hair was now a good 5 inches shorter
then the rest and had a minor conniption trying to figure out how to style it without advertising her sudden regression to fashion over function to the boys. If they even noticed shit like that.

By the time she made it to the start of the run the boys had already been there for a few minutes and were subtly not-talking to one another. Sakura already hyperaware of any sort of shifty glances on account of her hair immediately took notice.

Planting her hands on her hips she looked between the boys and demanded to know what was up. When neither spoke she turned her fiery eyes on Naruto and took a threatening step in his direction. Naruto subsequently panicked and spilled the beans while Sasuke sighed hatefully in the background.

“Me ‘n Sasuke made BFF- uh. RIVAL, yeah rival bracelets last night and didn’t make you one cause, cause you’re not… our rival?”

Offended and slightly hurt Sakura took a step back as her mind drifted to the memory of what Neji said to her. She’d also said some nasty things in return but words you secretly thought were true had ways of sticking close even when they shouldn’t.

She took a deep breath and squared her shoulders. Her eyes met Naruto’s with determination and even Sasuke perked up to see what was gonna happen (please hit Naruto please hit Naruto…).

“Good, you two aren’t my rivals either. Lee is ‘casue I beat up his first rival. So I’m already on a whole different level of rivals then both of you!” If they were going exclude her she was going to exclude them right back!

“In fact!” Sakura was going let her mouth run away with her, “In fact we are so far past your school yard rivalry we even have a, a secret handshake.”

They didn’t but the twin gasps of outrage were worth it. She’d track Lee down later and make one or something. Tenten would know where he was for sure and while she was at it they could make a secret handshake and BFF bracelets and get matching sunglasses that were girls only! Because boys were all terrible! All of them! Even the cute ones!

Spinning around she took off intent to make the boys practice chakra climbing first thing by way of the orphan slums. The distant sound of hounds rang like war drums before a battle.

Hours later Sakura was sitting alone in the library her back to Ogawa-san, Team 7’s favored shark-toothed librarian. She’d been slowly combing her way through previous team line ups and coming to more then one uncomfortable realization.

She knew, knew, there was something going on with Naruto. First he was an Uzumaki and no one who grew up in the Uzushio district did so without learning about the Uzumaki. Then there was the clones and ridiculous stamina. Last week she swore up and down she had snapped his wrist in a spar on accident and within half an hour it was as if he’d forgotten about the injury entirely. Naruto was never going to be the brains of the operation but he was clearly going to be one hell of a powerhouse built for down and out combat. Something that was truly a rarity in shinobi.

Then there was Uchiha Sasuke. The only Uchiha left in the village. Not only were the Uchiha built for war they had the bloodlines to back it up and Sasuke was of the main line. His prodigy status had already been confirmed for years and on top of that he seemed to hardly need additional instruction before instinctively latching onto a topic. The fact that he was rookie of the year hardly even ranked when considering how extreme his training regimen was if he was following the classic Uchiha style.
Never mind Hatake Kakashi the copy-nin.

Add in Sakura and it was ridiculously obvious that she was the loose end of the team. The one who was going to die eventually or fail or washout. Next to her teammates she was practically nothing. And Sakura was almost positive that her team was going to grow up and become an assault squad. The ones who got sent to the front to break the enemy lines. Who would spend days, months, years on the battlefield and get sent out again and again and again.

She sat there frustrated with herself and the village and her teammates. And in an instant felt envy and hate bubble up in her gut. Sure Naruto had some crazy weird social disgust that circulated across the village nearly as a whole but that didn’t stop the fact that he could sass at the Hokage and not get in trouble. That wasn’t normal. And Sasuke who was incredible and amazing and so, so pretty was a clan heir. Of a dead clan. The village would bend over backwards for him, everyone knew it.

Sitting back, she blew out a breath and tried to refocus on what she knew. Of the three teams formally graduated and promoted to genin Sakura was the only civilian child to do so. Sure Naruto technically counted in that but he was an Uzumaki even if he didn’t know what that meant (she put a pin in that for later). Other then herself, Naruto, and Kiba the rest of the graduated class were clan heirs. And even then Kiba was second in line and again Naruto was an Uzumaki.

Thinking of team compositions had Sakura pondering the other two teams that had graduated along side Team 7. Which in itself was unusual. Or perhaps not seeing as nearly the entirety of the class either was a clan heir or second in line. Typically, she knew that nearly all academy graduates would go on to become rank and file genin, it was near standard and the introduction of an extra test before then was something so rare that only… famous teams ever had them mentioned in their bios.

Which was probably the answer. Frowning Sakura left the history text behind and made for the active shinobi registers. As a new genin she only had access to current genin (and even then there were restrictions) but she could bet that what she was about to find would tell a different story then the one she and her teammates had heard through the grapevine.

A half hour of cross referencing later had Sakura reeling. It wasn’t true. Three teams hadn’t been passed this year, twelve full squads had. Sakura hadn’t even realized there were enough genin hopefuls in the academy to fill that many squads much less graduate. And if there were that many new bodies in the force why had Sakura been chosen for Team 7? She liked to think of herself as important, imagining herself as a badass kunoichi who was famous across the land but the reality was she was a 12-year-old girl with pink hair and a family infamous in the Konoha underground for setting disputes with the KOP discreetly. And Team 7 seemed to be made up of important people. Sasuke, Naruto, Kaka-sensei.

Did that mean Sakura was going to be important too? She knew that in the academy she had ranked alongside the clan kids easily and outscored everyone on theory and strategy including Shikamaru who was too busy napping to try hard at school. Had one of the instructors seen something and decided to put her on a squad that would allow her to grow and prove herself? Was there actually something to Naruto complaints that she hit really hard? She’d technically fought Hyuuga Neji twice now and come out either as the winner or tied.

And even though Lee called her his rival he couldn’t actually mean it. Lee was just… like that. The only true rival she had was Ino and that was about love not fighting or physical prowess, not really. Maybe there was a reason her paperwork had gone through the system so easily. Maybe she had just stumbled across her place on the team a little earlier then expected.

After all she was the team captain and Kaka-sensei’s bonafide apprentice.
Maybe that made her important. Maybe that made her dangerous.

Slowly a grin stretched across the girls face as she stacked her books and tediously put them back on their shelves. On her way out the door she forked over her pocket money to Ogawa-san’s frightening shark teeth, only about 8 more to go before Sakura was free.

(Sakura doesn’t know this because the only person she regularly just wails on is Naruto but she hits harder then any fresh academy graduate should, clan or no clan. No one else knows it either because Naruto heals and heals and heals and doesn’t think anything of his friend just hauling off and smacking him, after all he does the same thing to Sasuke and Sasuke does the same thing to everyone. Neji is the only one who would believe Naruto if only for the fact that Neji is half convinced Sakura is some sort of demon in the skin of a girl.)

(She was absolutely placed on Team 7 to die before her teammates make no mistake about it.)

“Hey Sasuke, Sasuke we need a secret handshake. We gotta. Its important. It’s - hey wait what are you – NO don’t lock me out again asshole! Come on man where am I gonna sleep… think of the teamwork… plus Sakura told me to stay out of my apartment… …ok so anyways about the handshake I think we need to like spit into out palms or something cool like that…”

(Negotiations on hold while Kakashi used the phone, something only civilians owned too easy to bug, to call his union rep and the lawyer the Hatake clan kept on retainer.)

Chapter End Notes

no beta we die like men

also y'all are amazing i got so many comments and love for the last chapter i literally sat down and wrote two whole chapters??????? CAN YOU BELIEVE????????????????

anyways i love all of you and its actually literally true that comments fuel my soul and writing ability apparently lollll

this chapter took a little bit of a serious turn but dont worry we will be back to our regularly scheduled crack soon enough
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Team 8 had been run so ragged in the last few months they hadn’t a thought to spare for former classmates. Kurenai-sensei was one hell of a taskmaster and was intent on turning the squad of heirs and spares into proper shinobi. They’d been run into the ground on D-ranks before Kurenai-sensei petitioned for their first C-rank. It had been remarkably straight forward and while not easy to complete it also was not difficult.

By design first C-ranks are meant to be a cakewalk, increasing in difficulty with each new mission for young ninja. The way of the world was brutal but preparing brutal children to face it correctly was almost guaranteed to work.

Most of the missions they had been running for the past month literally involved running to hell and back. Messengers, retrieval, tracking the local crane migration, you name it they did it. All chosen specifically to cultivate the latest generation of track and capture squads.

It helped they were super duper fun. Even if Shino was kinda weird, or if Hinata didn’t talk much, or if Kiba smelled really gross. Akamaru more then make up for all of it. (Best puppy.)

So it was with much confusion and shock when early on a bright Thursday morning Naruto and Sasuke thundered past. The future tracking team was headed to the Hokage tower hoping for an assignment that would take them across the largest trade route in the country, prime pickings for easy targets.

The sight of their former peers had the team pausing before glancing at one another as if someone had the answers.

“That was fuck’n weird right? Like I didn’t just hallucinate those two dumbasses, y’all saw ‘em?”

“We may have all been exposed to a hallucinogenic but that is unlikely. Why? Because we would not have experienced the same reactions as I generally have auditory hallucinations rather then visual.”

“Dude… you’re so fuck’n weird just say yes like a normal guy.”

“No. Because then I would have to expand on more then just my previous statement. It would be tedious and something wholly unnecessary. Unlike you, I and Hinata both value the severity of what is being spoken.”

“…uhhuh sure. Hey Hinata wanna see where they’re going?”

“…T-to the Hokage monument.”

“Wh… oh. Sweet. Let’s check it out.”

Sneakily following the boys of Team 7 was embarrassingly easy and Kiba was slightly ashamed to have graduated from the same academy as them. But perhaps it just went to show how intense their own training had been while the rest of the (three) teams had relaxed.

That was, until they came near the base of the mountain and watched Sakura just launch herself
thirty feet in the air and slam face first into the side of the monument. She slid nearly five or so feet down before catching herself and continuing a mad scramble upwards.

Naruto and Sasuke were running parallel with the stairs. Which while less impressive was still a little crazy. Team 8 had just started to learn how to chakra climb last week and the only one to get even a semblance of a grasp on it was Hinata.

Made sense with her clan training and all that, but damn it was hard to maintain a steady flow light enough not to be wasteful and still strong enough to glue yourself against the force of gravity.

Sakura let out a loud yell and launched herself straight up and somehow managed to fling herself a good way up the sheer cliffside.

Uneasy with the sudden realization that Team 7 had been up to some shit while they had been running around doing little missions the quadruplet slunk back into the shadows of the city and weaved through the market crowds intent on getting far away before discussing everything.

Finally, they came to a stop near the base of the Hokage tower.

“I think it was Sakura that hurt Neji-niisan,” said Hinata quietly. She fiddled with her fingers and looked down at the dirt unsure of the reliability of the gossip. Hanabi had been running with the Hokage’s grandson recently spying on an older girl and using the cover of the ‘Konohamaru Corps’ or whatever to do it.

The two boys and puppy didn’t say anything for a long moment. Hinata embarrassed and flighty sucked in a huge breath to continue the thought.

“I think she broke his hand last week too…” That had been a major event in the clan and Father had been furious with Neji about it. Hands were important to ninja and doubly so to Hyuuga. Without blades or chakra, a Hyuuga’s hand could still leave devastating blows.

Kiba slowly nodded rubbing his chin. The girl hadn’t hit very hard in academy spars but if you caught her unawares and got her riled up enough she left more then one kid seriously concussed back in the day. Typically, it was Naruto which was unfortunate for him, being so close to her every day.

“She is one to be wary of. I know this to be true because I once saw her kill a harmless house spider.” Shino was very certain of this and had been so since their second year at the academy. He had been particularly careful to keep his bugs away from the pink haired girl.

“We should spy on them,” said Kiba, decisively. Firstly, he was curious and secondly, he actually wanted to test their skills a little.

And so Team 8 never showed for their mission assignment and set out to follow Team 7 for the day. Kurenai watched from the shadows and wondered what was so fascinating about a fellow genin team, and also set out to trail the munchkins.

Other then the alarming display of chakra manipulation nothing truly exciting happened until Kakashi suddenly appeared next to the kids. Team 7 didn’t flinch but Team 8 sure did. Kurenai rolled her eyes when Kakashi flashed her a subtle sign mocking her students.

She watched as he set the kids up to spar in a rotational battle of two on one. With every hit they would swap out who was working with or against the other. That lasted a solid five minutes before it turned into a Sasuke vs Naruto with Sakura on the sidelines frustrated and left out.
Kakashi was hiding in a tree reading something that wasn’t Icha Icha for once and didn’t seem to notice his team failing at practice.

In the bushes Kiba, Shino, and Hinata watch enthralled as Sasuke punched Naruto in the face and Naruto in retaliation tried to kick the Uchiha in the balls. He missed and nailed Sasuke in the thigh. Therefore they were blindsided when Sakura aggressively and violently flung herself into the fight catching Naruto in the throat with her arm and swinging the smaller boy around into Sasuke.

Honestly they hadn’t been expecting Sakura to leap back into the fray. Generally, once the boys got to fighting the girls stepped back and let it happen. Maybe yelling in the background but they typically didn’t charge right into the middle of it all.

The fight continued for some time solidly Sakura vs the boys and they seemed to revel in it. Clearly Sakura was unpracticed in the katas and often forwent any sort of formal sparing techniques to fight the boys. Remarkably it seemed to work because Naruto was taking one hell of a beating and Sasuke was doing everything in his power to avoid the pink girl’s fists and make sure they landed on Naruto instead.

The boys beat a hasty retreat while Sakura panted to catch her breath. Team 8 watched as the boys had a quick discussion on their plan of attack (step one: ATTACK!) and Sakura finally sucked in a deep breath ready to go again.

She then tossed her head back and yelled to the sky for the entire training ground to hear.

“I AM DANGEROUS! AHHHRRRRGGGGGG!”

And lunged for her suddenly panicking teammates. A quick and fast scuffle left them all in a heap with no discernable winner.

Sakura, ever helpful, patted Naruto’s heaving chest and Sasuke’s leg in apology.

“Its ok you guys are dangerous too. We are going to be very very dangerous one day. And important. I figured it all out yesterday.”

Naruto let out a little whoop and punched his fist up to the sky. Sasuke grunted out a “duh” and didn’t do anything else.

Kurenai sat up a little straighter when Kakashi suddenly appeared next to his brood. He reached down and hauled Sakura up by the back of her shirt to dangle her at eye level frowning so severely it was apparent even through his mask.

“Sakura,” said Kakashi pausing as the girl answered with an equally flat “sensei” from his grip.

“What?!” is shrieked in tandem as both boys leap to their feet. None of them mention the equally loud exclamations from the bushes.

**Kurenai**
Sakura just hangs her head and quietly whispers “yes.”

Meanwhile Naruto is flitting all over the place demanding to know if the girl is ok and why she didn’t say anything and how much blood was there and if they needed to go kill Neji or if that ‘dumb white eyed prick’ was already dead in a ditch somewhere. Sasuke seems stuck between wanted to physically make sure his teammate wasn’t currently bleeding out and launching an outright attack on the Hyuuga compound this very instant.

There’s a deep sigh as Kakashi drops Sakura (she lands on her feet thank you very much) and rubs at his one visible eye.

“And why didn’t you tell at least your poor old sensei about it?”

Sakura glances around shiftily for a second digging her toe into the dirt.

“Well…. I told Pakkun-sensei about it… and uhm… what’s his name the jounin with the… bandana… Genma! Yeah Genma was there so I thought it was ok cause they healed it right up.”

Kurenai’s eyebrows shoot up at the mention of Genma and makes a mental note to find out what happened.

“Sakura… you’re a captain now and an official apprentice, unfortunately, you have to be more responsible and actually tell sensei about these things.”

The girl hunches her shoulders with the new explosion of noise at the apprentice bombshell.

Sasuke was pissed and Naruto was alternating between excited for the girl and outraged he didn’t get picked.

Both of them are yelling at an indifferent jounin who just ruffles their hair and walks off into the woods. His team trailing behind like angry ducklings.

Once they are sufficiently far enough away Kiba promptly yells out “Holy shit you were right!” at Hinata who shifts slightly unsure how to take these new developments.

Shino is the only one who takes it in stride determining that only a brutal arachnid killer like Sakura could ever be expected to become apprenticed to the Copycat. He mentally decides to make sure that any and all of his bugs will keep a strict radius from the girl from now on, even larger then previously established. Maybe he should warn his clansmen too…

Kurenai is about to herd her own team back in a reasonable direction like the Hokage tower when they, as one, make a break for it shooting after the other children. She sighs deeply and goes along for the ride.

Unfortunately, they arrive at the Hokage tower just in time to be roped into a multi-squad D-rank with Team 7. In the distance Kurenai spots Gai and his children hurriedly speed walking the other direction, Hyuuga Neji in the lead practically jogging. The mini Gai scruffed and dragged along as he yells something at… a rival?

The two teams eye one another wearily. It’d been a few months and the new dynamic as professional shinobi was uniquely different from that of classmates.

Kurenai is about to step in and help the kids out when an older member of the genin-corps calls out to them.
“Yo, Haruno, if you try and kill ‘em make sure to break an arm this time I got money on this!”

Sakura flushes as pink as her hair and waves weakly at the woman, who laughs at Naruto shaking his fist and Sasuke’s hissing.

“Shut-up lady! Tell’n Sakura-chan how to hurt people if you bet ‘n it takes you out of the money! You stupid or someth’n?”

Naruto also had money on the arm thing and didn’t want his chances to be hurt by interference.

“Maa…. Sakura is in charge so shoo and earn your keep now.” Kakashi waves both teams off then gestures to keep Kurenai back.

She watches her kids leave, and their faint confusion over who was in charge for a moment, before raising an eyebrow at Kakashi. He shrugs and nods his head towards the barbeque shop.

Next thing she knows she’s sitting across from the man with a plate full of food not-watching Kakashi speed eat.

And then:

“You’re a girl.” Again, Kurenai’s eyebrows shoot up and Kakashi looks vaguely uncomfortable but doesn’t back down from the question.

“Last time I had a conversation with myself about my gender and presentation I decided that yes I definitely am a girl.” She could roll with anything. Plus, her wording made Kakashi squirm even more.

“Right so… I have a student, Sakura, who is also a girl-“

“Uh-huh.”

“And! And she uh. Is now my apprentice…” Kakashi trails off searching for whatever it is he’s trying to get at.

Kurenai, who has her own questions, uses the time to ask about it, “So is she like your official clan apprentice or just a protégé?”

All she really gets in return is a grumble and another shrug. Finally, Kakashi seems to get himself together enough to ask whatever it was he’d been trying to this whole time.

“What do I do about her being so aggressive? She’s beat up one of Gai’s twice now, I guess, and she’s mean… I mean girls can be mean but this one – it doesn’t seem right for her? She never seemed the type and her academy profile has nothing on any sort of aggression issues…”

Eating another bite Kurenai just stares at Kakashi for a long time wondering if he was usually this dumb and just had them all fooled.

“Kakashi I hate to break it to you but that girl is going to grow up murdering people for money… aggression is usually an asset.”

“But I don’t think… She’s just…Maybe a medic?” Oh holy god, how had Kakashi fallen for that pitfall of nonsense?

“Does she want to be a medic? Have you actually assessed your team for their strengths yet? Or even asked them what they want to be professionally?”
Kakashi’s eyes go grave and he slowly nods then seems to think better of it and gives a small head shake.

“Sakura wants to be dangerous… she’s been going on about it for a few days.”

“…Ok? So make her dangerous. If anyone can its you, dude.”

“But… doesn’t that come later for girls? When they are chunnin? Or specialize?” Kakashi is hesitant and unsure and all of a sudden Kurenai remembers that Kakashi spent all of 6 weeks in the academy and his team had already been trained by the time he got to them. He really doesn’t know.

Kurenai goggles at this for a moment before clearing her throat.

“Kakashi,” Kurenai starts slowly making sure to have the man’s attention, “its your job to make sure there is a later. If you don’t train her now she has three options eventually… you know that right?”

At his silence Kurenai takes that to mean he really truly doesn’t know that. Nodding she ticks off the options as she lays it all out.

“One they die. That’s it. They go out and never come back. Two they washout and never advance and eventually quit. Three they go career undercover.” Both of them knew what undercover meant and both of them had done it a time or two but they also knew that those who went career never came out right. If you had no other skills to contribute to the village you at least had your body and all it was worth.

The two jounin sit in silence for a minute as it sinks in.

“Plus… if she’s actually your apprentice and you don’t train her… won’t you get in trouble? With the village and your clan?” Kurenai is a fourth gen shinobi but she’s not of any clan and doesn’t know how it works when someone is and takes on a protégé. In her case it would mean the kid would become her heir and she specifically would train them in all of her specialized and invented techniques. Kakashi probably had expectations so far beyond that she couldn’t fathom it. Also clans were super weird and all of them different so who the fuck knew.

By the way Kakashi visibly blanches he clearly hadn’t thought of that either. He taps his fingers on the table in a quick one-two thinking hard about everything.

“If I train her… won’t the boys be mad I’m focusing on Sakura instead of them?”

And Kurenai who had been patent and understand promptly decides not to be anymore and smacks her hand on the table making all the plates rattle and the nearby patrons turn and look.

“If you ignore her and prioritize male anger over Sakura because it might hurt the boys’ feelings you are a fool Hatake Kakashi. You turned in the paperwork, you picked her, she’s on your team. If you don’t train her there isn’t anyone else to pick up the slack. No one. I read the files too, that girl is a civilian first gen she doesn’t have a clan or a secret apprenticeship lined up. She has you and that’s it.”

Kurenai slashed her hand aggressively on the last sentence fed up with ignorant sexism from a man she hadn’t expected it from.

“All of those kids need you to be there and train them. And you need to train them right. If you don’t their actions are on you. If they fail, you fail. If they quit, you caused it. If they die it’s a mark on your soul. I don’t know what it is you’re thinking but that girl is your apprentice but that doesn’t mean you neglect any of your students either. What the fuck Kakashi? You should know better then
With that she pushes away from the table and for the first time ever leaves Kakashi with the bill. She has to find her team and make sure they're finishing the mission correctly.

Across the village six genin and a puppy stand by and watch a barn burn to the ground. All of them are dirty and singed and Sakura had her face hidden in her hands. This was going to be a problem. Seeing as their mission had been paint the barn, not destroy it. She wasn't even sure what caused the fire.

(Sasuke had tried to set Kiba’s hair on fire and caught some loose hay at the same time. The two had panicked and in doing so hadn’t put the flames out letting it spread into an uncontrollable inferno.)

Sakura was pretty sure it was Sasuke’s fault since he was the only one who knew any fire jutsu and quietly swore to herself that she needed to become an even better captain cause clearly Naruto and Sasuke would be lost without her. And probably on fire. She patted Hinata's shoulder in solidarity, solemnly whispering out of the side of her mouth "Don't worry Hinata-san boys are always going to be dumb."

Hinata, surprised at the contact and slightly confused by the advice, only nodded and whispered back "Thats ok though cause we're here... right?"

Beaming at the other girl Sakura grins and says with utter confidence "I think the reason they don't make all girl genin squads is cause we'd destroy everyone else and then what'll the village do with so many hurt feeling from the other clans?"

Theres a pause while Hinata thinks about this before giggling quietly, the fire raging in the background. It was probably true. Especially if Sakura had beaten Neji.

"Uhm... Sakura-chan? Did you... did you beat Neji-niisan last week?"

Sakura paused to think for a second rubbing at her chin "Ah... I think it was more of a draw that time ya know?"

"I - uhm, could you.. could you show me how you did it sometime?"

Sakura thinks for a moment about her, a civilian first gen, showing the Hyuuga clan heir how to fight her own cousin. She slowly nods still thinking of the ramifications.

"Sure Hinata-san... I dunno when but when I have time I'll stop by the compound?"

"Yes! Please!"

A little while later sitting all alone without her team in an interrogation room, the same one as before, Sakura told Nara Akio not to worry 'cause she was going to be just as dangerous as the rest of her team one day.

Akio didn’t even blink before telling her that she should be careful then because little girls were always dangerous - and she was already well on her way. Which made the little terror glow with delight as she relayed the events of the day (without throwing Sasuke-kun under the bus because even though she knew he did it, she didn’t actually see it ya know).
A slightly horrified Kurenai picked up her traumatized team from T&I and swept them away intent on keeping them as far away from bad influences as possible. (She didn't know about the tentative plans the girls had made.)

Kakashi meandered his way in a little later and watched Sakura and the Nara talk for a long time through the two-way glass before taking his own team away.

He took them off to an empty training field and let the pack lose to maul them with doggy kisses and ear sratches while Kakashi sat back and thought about everything for a while. Eventually he came to a decision and called the team over.

Siting in a circle each kid had a dog to pet, though Sakura had three, and kept quiet while Kakashi figured out how words worked when talking to 12 year olds.

“Alright we can… do training or we can do a test and its up to you guys… I was thinking of nominating you for the test but if all three of you are serious it will set your training back a bit because we have to focus on the test…” Kakashi trailed off as he tried to think of how to explain the chunnin exams without giving away it was the chunnin exams.

“You mean the chunnin exams Kaka-sensei?” asked Sakura totally giving it away. Naruto and Sasuke both perked up at that, excited by the concept of promotion.

Kakashi frowned at Sakura, who grinned back, before nodding. “Yes. The chunnin exams are coming up and I thought about nominating you but if you want we can focus on training and come back to the exams in six months.”

The kids looked torn, on the one hand training sounded great but on the other fighting a bunch of other kids sounded great too. Plus, if they got a promotion they got a pay raise which was even better.

Finally, Sakura took stock and asked “What about lots of training before the exams? Right now?”

Kakashi just sighed and said “I was thinking of taking you three on a training trip for the next month and the exams start in two weeks.”

Naruto excited at both options cuddled Shiba closer finally piping up with his own questions.

“What’re we gonna learn Kaka-sensei? How to fight? To kick butt? Lotsa cool jutsu? Ooo what about a jutsu that kicks butt for you? Also like maybe someth’n that scares people so they run away before any butt kicking has to happen? Or maybe someth’n that’s like I dunno insane and powerful and makes people go ‘ahhhh!’ but also 'hmmm’… so are we gonna do someth’n like that Kaka-sensei?”

The wall of words had Kakashi reeling and he let out a quiet “uh..” as Sasuke muttered he needed to get stronger and if an exam wouldn’t make it happen he wanted to go on a training trip.

Sakura watched her teammates before nodding. “Yeah I think we want training Kaka-sensei but first we gotta do some paperwork so Naruto doesn’t lose his apartment again while we’re gone ok?”

“Uh sure. Wait what happened with the apartment?”

“Don’t worry! Sakura-chan fixed cause she’s the best and kinda scary!”

And that was that.
The next day Team 7’s departure was delayed because Sakura was challenged by Lee to a rival match that somehow lead to Sakura getting thrown in the slammer and Neji sent to the hospital again. Neji hadn’t even been part of this bullshit but somehow, somehow he got dragged in anyways. Tenten and Naruto had a shady money exchange when Kakashi wasn’t looking and Sasuke wondered what a solo apprenticeship would be like and if he could get one effective immediately.

Now for those in the back who haven’t been paying attention Kakashi passed a team of morons and then left them under the supervision of a dog for nearly three months. And when he came back it was to no money and a horde of paperwork he wasn’t prepared to complete so he basically signed his name and life away without actually reading the fine print.

And in doing so rerouted the basic fundamentals of how the team was suppose to be composed.

Sarutobi Hiruzen was getting a kick out of it, at least, even if his council – plus Danzo – looked ready to drop dead from mortification every time a new report of Team 7 came in from the countryside.

Mostly because Kakashi, in his wisdom, saw money signs over the house of Haruno and tried to get some before he left for a bullshit apprenticeship he didn’t agree to. It didn’t work and so he went off to the only girl he knew that wasn’t clinically insane, probably, to ask for advice.

It wasn’t that he was scared straight but he was scared adjacent and had decided the only way to figure this out was to take the children out on a training trip mostly to keep Sakura from serving actual jail time while he sorted out this mess.

Of course the only way he knew to test little ninja in their abilities was to make them preform live operations. So in the smallest rural town Kakashi couldn’t find on a map he set the kids lose with strict instructions to bring back something illegal (leaving that purposely vague to see what they came up with) a rule abiding citizen shouldn’t have been able to find.

“So like… drugs?” Asked Naruto.

“Sure. That could be an option.” Answered Kakashi before pairing each kid off with a dog to supervise.

And then because he was worried that a team of poorly socialized puppies would suddenly show everyone in the universe what they had found, he tacked on a “don’t get caught and bring it to the campsite first” clause to the exercise.

While the kids took off Kakashi sat down next to his little campfire and set about reading the general Hatake guidelines of ‘so you got yourself an apprentice and don’t know what to do’ pamphlet.

His bet was Sakura would return near empty handed, Sasuke would be somewhere in the middle with maybe something super dangerous but only a small amount, and Naruto would turn up with something not drugs but very contraband like bread or something ridiculous.

…He lost that bet.

When all of the tiny assassins returned Kakashi had them unload their wares for inspection. Sasuke
handed over a wad of counterfeit bills and a single unstamped cigarette, Naruto had a pound of raw unprocessed opium and a wad of bills while accusing Sasuke of copying him, Sakura dumped out her bag to reveal dice, a block of steel, half a yard of undyed Suna linen, and of all things a statue of an owl with it’s head turned backwards.

Eyeing the pile cautiously Kakashi had the girl explain it to her teammates.

Pointing at each item Sakura did so.

“So technically gambling isn’t… illegal if you do it the right way but we are way outside of Konoha territory and this prefecture is, I think, controlled by the Otogawa clan who typically are super straight laced about a lot of things. The steel is junk and is probably going to be used as a filler in tools while the steel that’s suppose to be used is sold to weapons manufactures at triple the price, the linen is untraceable, and the owl is a reproduction of a one of a kind statue in the Daimyo’s house.”

Nodding along Kakashi picked up the bar flipping it around before asking, “How did you find this?”

With zero hesitation Sakura replied with a flat “There’s a train station here and a minor production outpost for weapons and agricultural tools. It employs a third of the population in the area.”

She left it at that and Kakashi had to gesture for her to continue. She sighed then seemed to notice the awe on Naruto’s face and the interest on Sasuke’s.

“The production of weapons is sanctioned by the Daimyo and only so much can be made a year outside of territories controlled by Konoha or the Shogunate… Which means that this facility is making ‘tools’ all year long to supplement their low weapons quota’s… but Konoha is literally only a couple hundred kilometers west so they probably make weapons all year and use the tools as a cover and do that by swapping out their steel…”

Eyebrows raised Kakashi lead with another question mildly interested in how a 12-year-old knew more about illicit trade then your average chunnin.

“And how do you know so much about this, little apprentice?”

“Uh… trade secret Kaka-sensei!” Sakura promptly hushed up because she probably shouldn’t be letting the law, even if the law was her teacher, in on what Uncle Takuma got up to in his shop.

Sending his student a spectacular side-eye for a man with only one eye available, Kakashi turned his attention to the boys.

“Naruto, Sasuke? Who wants to go next?”

Both boys shook their heads vigorously, very aware that their hauls did not measure up to the team captain’s.

Finally, Naruto pointed at the drugs and said “I got that from the evidence lockup in town hall… and I picked some slimy dude’s pocket for the money which felt funky so I thought that it might be… fake or something…”

In the background Urushi, who had dutifully followed Naruto around, snickered. When the boss said ‘something illegal’ Naruto sure did interpret that in a way only Naruto would think to.

For lack of anything better to do or say Kakashi simply resorted to patting the blond on the head for a job done good. Naruto beamed like a thousand suns in return so obviously Kakashi did the right thing there.
Sasuke frowning and aware that of the three he was the one to fall short managed to growl out “Picked some pockets near the casino.”

And left it at that.

Leaning over Naruto nudged the other boy in the ribs to get him to keep talking. Sasuke didn’t talk but he sure did smack Naruto for the nudge.

Kakashi sighed, deeply and with feeling. He wasn’t exactly sure how this whole training and subsequent training trip was supposed to go. Maybe he was being too vague (yes) or wasn’t trying to connect with his little genin (also yes). Or maybe he shouldn’t be testing them like this and should instead just teach them something.

That was a thought. Alright he’d teach them to tree climb. What a plan.

“Alright we are gonna do some life or death training.”

Standing up and setting out to do so left the three kids scrambling after him and the entire pack lazing around the fire. This was going to be good.

At the base of a fairly large tree Kakashi turned and started to monolog about chakra before hesitating and making sure the kids were actually following.

“Cat-ra yeah I can use that.” Said Naruto.

It was Sasuke’s turn to elbow Naruto. He did so with relish and hissed out of the corner of his mouth “Its called chakra dumbass.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

Ignoring them Kakashi continued for a moment before directing them to climb a tree without their hands. He hesitated for a moment waiting for some sort of explosion from the kids or at least a question or two. When he got none he looked down at them to find them already looking up at him expectantly.

Sakura, looking puzzled, slowly asked “You, you want us to climb the tree without our hands using chakra? That’s it? That’s the training?”

She glanced at the boys and all three brats shared a shrug before turning and running straight at their chosen trees. Kakashi sighed annoyed that they hadn’t even stuck around to get the rest of the instructions about marking their progress and cocked his head to see what would happen.

To his complete and utter surprise all three kids, including Naruto, made it to the top of each tree before sitting down and waiting to hear what the rest of the training was going to be.

Glaring at Pakkun Kakashi whisper yelled at the pug “Did you already show them this?”

Pakkun didn’t even move as he yawned showing off all his doggy teeth in one go. That was all the answer Kakashi was gonna get until he gave the pack an answer in return.

“Well back down, that was just a test, everyone passes.” Kakashi called up to the genin turned squirrels.

To his faint befuddlement Sakura simply hopped off her branch and landed on the balls of her feet
some 80 feet below with a soft burst of chakra to gentle her landing. Sasuke went the safer route of bouncing branch to branch while Naruto simply slid down the trunk like it was a pole.

Staring at the girl Kakashi wondered how the hell she hadn’t broken any bones in that move. It required some finicky chakra control to reinforce not only your feet but the accompanying muscles, ligaments, bones and everything else that would be jarred by such an impact onto flat land. Sure chakra did a lot naturally to help the body but this early in the game those instincts basically didn’t exist.

Once everyone was on the ground Kakashi motioned for them to follow before setting out for some water. Not far from the camp he found himself a nice little pond that was fed by a fairly decent sized stream.

“Since we have chakra climbing figured out, next is how to,” here he paused to dramatically walk onto the pond, “walk on water.”

He turned back to the kids to find them clustered at the shoreline. Naruto was cautiously dipping a toe to test the water while Sasuke seemed intent to try and figure it out by keeping one foot on solid ground and placing the other tentatively over the shallows. Sakura meanwhile had her eyebrows furrowed with a deep frown of concentration. Taking a step back the girl launched herself into a run directly at Kakashi, who simply watched.

Sakura made it all of five steps before disappearing under the soft surface ripples with a shriek. She reappeared a moment later sputtering. Officially she had made it five steps farther then Kaakshi expected. Walking over to the girl until his toes were even with her face, Kakashi sent the girl a smile and a “Good try!”

Apparently she didn’t take it as the encouragement it was meant to be, because she growled like an angry puppy and smacked her hands on the water for a second.

In the background Naruto screamed he was drowning while flailing around in the shallows and Sasuke danced backwards to avoid being splashed.

While Kakashi was distracted making sure Naruto didn’t actually drown (did he even know how to swim?) Sakura placed her hands flat on the surface and pushed up. She visualized climbing out of a pool and found herself standing, wobbly, next to Kakashi.

Kakashi turned back to the girl in surprise and then glanced down at her feet, which were still an inch or so below the surface. Face squished up in concentration Sakura took one step then another pulling herself the rest of the way up with sheer determination. She snapped her arms straight out from her sides for balance when a fish swam past and nearly sent her tumbling back to the depths.

Naruto and Sasuke had quit trying and were attempting to actually drown one another and had to be separated.

Well, fuck, man this was just great. Now what was he suppose to teach em? How to gut a man?

It was probably a little early for that…

Kakashi sweated trying to think of more things to teach the brats since Pakkun had stolen his ace a few months ago. So he mostly sat back at the fire while Sakura slid around getting a feel for the water and the boys tried not to drown for the next few days.

…He should have just dumped them in the chunnin exam.
still no beta we die like men

YALLLLL ARE SO AMAZING IM GOING TO ANSWER ALL THE COMMENTS ASAP BUT HOLY SHIT COMMENTS LITERALLY DO FUEL MY WRITING
no srsly i got another 10k in progress right now that might be ready before the end of the year???? i have no idea but i thought my writing was just fueled by spite. damn i was so wrong its love
LOVE IS THE MOST POWERFUL WRITING FUEL YOU HEAR THAT MUSE

also haha did i just skip the chunnin exams?? just wait and see... HAPPY HALLOWEEN BTW
Naruto and Sasuke strolled along through the latest nameless town Kakashi had dragged them to in the last few days. Urushi and Bisuke trotted at their heels happily answering inquires about their origin.

It was almost as frustrating as Kakashi’s original introduction.

“So... Did’ja go to school or, or something for ninja.. dogs?” Naruto was asking. Sasuke scoffed at the ridiculous delivery but didn’t do it loudly because he wanted to know the answer as well.

“Yeah just like you did. Had to graduate and everything.” Answered Bisuke. Naruto nodded like he understood (he didn’t) while Sasuke scoffed again but louder this time.

“Are you from the Inuzuka kennels?” Sasuke asked getting at the root of it.

“Nope.” Chirped Urushi unhelpfully. Both dogs sent doggy smiles and tail wags at the boys who were thinking hard about their next question.

“Ah! You’re summons! So you’re from... the summon... place? Thing.” Naruto pointed excitedly at the dogs waiting for confirmation.

Both dogs glanced at one another before Bisuke shrugged and Urushi turned a sharper doggy grin up at the boys answering with a happy “Well you’re half right. We’re summons but not from Sandai Hikyō.”

Naruto threw his hands up in frustration while Sasuke pondered this quietly to himself. “Summons but not summons, not from anywhere else... where would sentient dogs come from...”

Naruto still frustrated and eavesdropping on Sasuke’s quiet mumbling couldn’t help but interrupt.

“Sap-ent.”

“What?”

Both boys paused for a second while Sasuke mentally ran over everything he had just said to make sure that Naruto of all people wasn’t correcting his vocab.

“I think that you mean uh. Sa-pi-nt.” He sounded it out carefully clearly unsure of the pronunciation.

“And that’s a made up word.” Sasuke decided firmly after a second of trying to figure out what Naruto was talking about.

Naruto pouted for a second rallying to defend himself when Bisuke cut in with a “All human words are made up.”

“Ha! See! I told ya, you’re using the wrong word!” Naruto crowed utterly delighted with this development.
Scowling Sasuke shook his head furiously “No that’s not an actual word people use.”

Glaring thunderously back at the other boy, Naruto opened his mouth to start yelling and ruin everyone on the streets day.

Urushi seeing which way the wind was blowing suggested that maybe they could look up the words to see who was right once and for all.

About ten minutes later found both boys in the back of a local bookstore digging through a couple of dictionaries. Naruto was using various pronunciations to find his mysterious word while Sasuke sat back with his own book open and definition circled.

“Aha! Sapient… possessing… great wisdom.” Naruto frowned at the book for a second and said to no one in particular “Wait I think its missing something.”

And with that he trotted off deeper into the store to ask the woman in the front for help. Sasuke watched all of this without interfering and then returned to scratching Bisuke’s ears. Urushi was asleep under the table.

About a half hour later Naruto came back toting an even larger book and thumped it down on the table in front of Sasuke. Pointing at a passage Naruto painstakingly read it out loud as if Sasuke didn’t have two perfectly functional eyes.

“Sapience is self… knowledge and the ability for an in-di-vid-ual to… make judgments… understanding situations.” Here Naruto paused before flipping to another page deeper into the book, this passage was highlighted. “…Sapiens is the species of modern man… meaning ‘dare to know.’”

Naruto sat back (he wasn’t sitting and had to scramble to make that topple backwards to the nearest chair look intentional) proud of himself. Grinning at Sasuke he happily said “I figured Sakura-chan woulda kept looking for the answer ya know?”

Sasuke glowered at the book and the boy, vaguely annoyed that Naruto’s word actually existed and was also kinda important. Not that he’d ever heard it before in his entire life or anything. But if that was a word that described people, as like, an entire species or something it was probably important. Maybe.

Pointing at his own circled passage Sasuke snapped “Sentient. Aware.” And left it at that.

There was a moment of silence where both boys digested the fact they didn’t know which word was more accurate for talking dogs.

It didn’t matter because the woman working the front appeared and asked that they pay for the books they’d written in and to kindly get out of her store. So three books heavier and an air of befuddlement surrounding them like a haze the boys and dogs walked back to their campsite.

What was left of their campsite.

Instead of a nice little clearing in a nice little forest Naruto and Sasuke stood on the edge of a massive and destructive crater. With no Sakura or Sensei or rest of the pack to be found. Trading glances, the boys dropped their books ran after the dogs already on the trail.

They didn’t run far before they came across a crispy Kakashi looming over an equally crispy Sakura running suicides along the branches of a moderately sized oak. Noticing the boys Kakashi waved for them to stay back before snapping at Sakura to do a hundred more, double time, before she even thought about taking a water break. The girl, singed, sweaty, and gasping didn’t even nod just ran all
the harder.

A while later, after the boys made a new campsite (just to the left of the old one), Sakura stumbled her way back. She was shaky and gross but determined. Taking a seat across from Kakashi who let her eat the fish Naruto handed her without comment. (Everything was destroyed with the camp so no rations.)

“I fixed the trigger on the paper bombs.” Said Sakura.

“Ah…” Said Sasuke because he wasn’t aware there was a problem.

“Sweet! Instantaneous now?” Said Naruto because he didn’t know there was a problem per say, but most smoke bombs and little explosives had a five to eight second delay and it was stupid and maybe other types had that as well.

“If you can talk you can run. Go back and do two hundred more with chakra.” Kakashi, who almost got done in by a little girl with pink hair, snapped.

Sakura gobbled down the end of the fish and saluting the boys she headed back to the trees.

(Sakura had been fiddling with a seal for a while and Kakashi had genuinely thought nothing of it. He’d seen quite a few littered around her bedroom when stopping by to retrieve his dogs and even more in the pouches and holsters of his genin when rifling through to see if they had the correct supplies – typically not. When the seal suddenly sparked and Sakura tossed it away in a panic scrambling backwards he’d lunged for the girl, barely making it to the edge of the blast radius.

The bomb, fueled not only by the chakra activation and what had been stored inside but also by the open flame that engulfed the paper just as it exploded, had caused it to be a truly massive explosion by normal standards and vaguely vexing by shinobi since it meant that a normal leap out of dodge wasn’t quite enough to avoid burns.

Since Kakashi had leapt to the rescue the pack had dodged for safety and were largely fine other then a slight ringing in their ears.)

It’s a few days later that Sakura finally managed to just haul one off and clock Sasuke in the face.

It was mostly an accident since they were sparing but Sakura was always nervous against Sasuke. Internally panicking over how her crush would react to every little move she made. If she hit hard would he think her an uncivilized brute? If she didn’t hit hard then a spoiled civilian lady? What if her kata’s looked bad or didn’t flow right? Or she fumbled her blades?

Look. Its hard to be 12 and even harder to be a 12-year-old assassin in the making so Sakura was struggling, just a little bit. She could run missions with the boy no problem. Even bossing him around was no big deal. If she got nervous she just remembered that he voted for her (he didn’t but he also didn’t fight it so same difference) and she was officially and legally allowed to boss and sass at him.

Sparring was generally a different story. She tried to keep her emotions on lock and not hurt him while staying strictly within the purview of traditional shinobi spars, per the Academy.

Of course managing all of that emotional drama internally, surviving Kakashi’s ultimate revenge training for everything, and the fact her IED had destroyed all of her clothes (Kaka-sensei was being petty and wouldn’t let her replace anything from the town. She’d also blown up most of her money
so there was that…) she was having a little bit of a hard time.

So when Sasuke let out one of his scoffs and snarked out a “How the hell did you beat Hyuuga if you hit like *that*?”

That was the first tick on Sakura’s raising fury level.

(“Ohh bastard’s gonna get it. Sakura-chan hits really hard.” Naruto whispered to Kakashi.)

When Sasuke swatted a strike away then lashed out and instead of hitting her just put his hand flat on her face and pushed Sakura backwards onto her butt like she was a child. That was the second tick.

(“Really, really hard.” Naruto took a dramatic step backwards despite being on the sidelines. Kakashi wondered if it was true or if Naruto was just being a baby.)

When Sasuke turned his eyes and face away from his opponent to say “Sensei can we get yakitori later?” implying he was going to win since the winner picked dinner. Three strikes you’re out!

A growl, not unlike that of a dog, had Sasuke whipping his head back around to his errant partner just in time for a punch to land right between his eyes. It was Sasuke’s turn to stumble backwards onto his butt, seeing stars. Reeling the Uchiha tried to blink the pain away but that hurt too much and had to squint only to see Sakura approaching.

Her face had him scrambling backwards like a crab. Sasuke didn’t go far and ended up sprawled on his back. The impact of his head hitting the ground made the stars even brighter. It really hurt. Like. A lot.

Bringing one hand to his face he went to feel around for the damage only for a larger, gloved hand to catch his.

“Maa… don’t touch that. I’m gonna have to set it. Alright sit up, no good to swallow blood.” Kakashi, unsympathetic, pulled Sasuke up and had him tilt forward to keep the blood from his broken nose from draining down his throat and into his stomach.

The motion had Sasuke’s stomach rolling, it hurt so bad. Everything hurt. And he couldn’t see. Or he couldn’t see out of his left eye. Wow this was sucky. He was never going to shit talk the Hyuuga again if this was what happened on the wrong side of Sakura’s fist.

How the hell was Naruto alive?

A cloth and something cold got shoved at him and when he didn’t make a move to take it, someone held it against his face. The cold on his eye and the cloth to his nose.

Embarrassed to be treated like a baby Sasuke slapped the hands away only to glance the edge of his face in the same move. It hurt (by a metric fuckton) and when Sasuke came back to himself he was curled sideways on the ground, the same hands holding the cloth and icepack.

Sasuke vaguely recognized Kakashi’s voice directing his teammates and the pack. To pick up something. Or do something. Whatever. If they were doing that who was holding this shit against his face?

No one apparently… His nose wasn’t bleeding anymore and the icepack had been propped up by a rock.

His eye (just the singular – the left one wasn’t working) trailed from the rock upwards to Kaka-sensei
crouched over him.

“Yo.” Said Kakashi peering down at the boy.

Sasuke wanted to glare but his face hurt too much for that so he settled on not blinking.

“We’re headed back to Konoha. Looks like Sakura broke your orbital socket and we don’t want anything to happen to your eye… with you being an Uchiha and all.”

Kakashi smiled with his singular eye to emphasize his point. He also reached out and caught Sasuke’s hand before it touched the injury.

“No, no don’t touch that. I set your nose already and your face is… fragile right now.”

Now Kakashi wasn’t a mean sensei and he wasn’t about to make a teammate walk on a broken bone all the way to Konoha. But since Sasuke didn’t have a broken bone in his foot or leg he was going to walk all the way to Konoha. Unless he wanted to be carried like a baby.

The absolute hiss of fury answered that question.

(Sasuke ended up being carried like a baby anyways when he fainted about four miles down the road. He’d tripped and clenched his jaw and basically the bones in your face are all connected so... After that Kakashi made the other two kids run back to Konoha framing it as endurance training.)

Eventually back in the village, sitting in the waiting room of the med center, Kakashi frowned down at the liability paperwork. Sasuke was tilting slowly to the side next to Kakashi, doped up on field meds with an emergency ice-pack taped to his face. Sakura sat on Kaka-sensei’s other side dirty and smelly and utterly self conscious.

Naruto was asleep on the floor.

The dogs had taken off as soon as they set foot past the gates, probably off to Sakura’s to mooch treats off her parents and lounge in the superior air conditioning.

By the time Kakashi had waded through most of the paperwork the medics have carted Sasuke into the back to see a specialist leaving the sensei, the culprit, and Naruto in the lobby.

“…Sakura… you haven’t had outside training – in the academy I mean?” Asks Kakashi.

The girl frowns wondering what he’s getting at. Her parents were civilians and the only advice she’d ever gotten was from her dad ‘to hit ‘em so hard they don’t get back up and hit you back’ which was common sense honestly. Well, and her mom liked to drag her off to one of the Uzushio district weapon depots occasionally for maintenance advice from a distant cousin.

But that was it. Everything else was academy taught and possibly why she was light-years behind the majority of her classmates.

“Uh, no?”

“Right. How long did it take you to learn to chakra climb?”

“I got it on the first try... Pakkun-sensei said that was a good thing…” Confused about the questions Sakura raises her eyes towards Kakashi’s face. His is tilted up to the ceiling as if trying to count the number of tiles.

“You know, the pack wants you to cultivate your own.” Kakashi says that bombshell completely flat
not giving and ounce of how he feels about it. Sakura blinks eyes going wide. They want her to what?!

A slow grin is stretching across her face in delight (she’s going to get puppies!). Its halted by Kakashi holding up a hand.

“Technically that’s going to happen anyways as my apprentice. Which I’m sure you had a hand in making happen? Hmm?” His singular eye slants sideways at the girl.

“Anyways how did you know where the trigger was in that seal arraignment?” He probably should have asked after the crime but he honestly didn’t think of it till just now.

This had Sakura tilting her head wondering if Kaka-sensei was asking a trick question. Even infants knew this one. Pulling out one of her tags (she doesn’t catch Kakashi’s twitch of alarm) she slowly points to the trigger.

There’s silence in the lobby except for Naruto’s snoring. Sakura’s eyes dart around, she’s not sure what else Kaka-sensei wants from her. Hesitantly Sakura says “It’s the same trigger on all activation style seals?”

Sure the mechanism and results of the seals differ but the basic array components are all the same. And once she got to thinking about it after that day in the library her brain started putting together the puzzle pieces she hadn’t realized littered the streets of the Uzushio district.

Kakashi huffs before turning to face the door. A woman in a professional lab coat walks out, hands shoved deep in her pockets. She takes in the lobby occupants and jerks her head for Kakashi to follow before leaving. Kakashi stands to follow pausing to pat Sakura on the shoulder.

“Get Naruto home. Meet me at 0400 tomorrow on the bridge, little apprentice.”

Sakura scowls, what was the whole point of waiting if she was just gonna get kicked out before seeing Sasuke. She directs her scowl down to Naruto and nudges him in the ribs to wake up.

The next morning Sakura and the pack troop down to the bridge to wait for Kaka-sensei. She’s sure that its just a waste of time and that Kakashi isn’t going to show any time soon but this is the first official meet up of master and apprentice.

She’s in luck and Kakashi appears exactly on time. Its unnerving and Sakura isn’t sure what to say to the man for a moment as she takes in his appearance. Firstly, it looks like he hasn’t slept in about a hundred years and simultaneously that he literally just woke up. Kakashi wasn’t even wearing his standard jounin fatigues opting for casual loung clothes (and mask). His hair was flat on one side.

Kakashi equally unnerved by the early hour and pissed with himself for picking it just glares at the trees for a solid minute before walking off the bridge.

Sakura and the pack (the traitors leaving him to wallow in his empty apartment and the terrible AC) follow at his heels. Abruptly stopping in the middle of the street, Sakura bouncing off his back, he peers over his shoulder at the girl before asking “Why are you messing with seals anyways?”

He continues on walking as Sakura explains that she thinks they’re kinda neat and that being able to blow up an enemy before they reach you has gotta count for something. Plus, if everyone has to deal with a delay then why not change it up and make it happen faster or slower then the norm? Isn’t that what being a ninja is about?
She continues like this for a while explaining the seals in the library and on the paperwork and in the filing she’s had to do in the past few months and how that, more then the academy, has given her a basic overview of most broad-range sealing structures used in Konoha.

And then she brings up living in the Uzushio district and how she hadn’t even realized that not everyone used seals. She skirts over the thing with the bathhouse. And uses Naruto as an easy distraction since most of her exploding tags and various paper bombs were confiscated (by her) off of the blond. She’d left him one of each plus his original stash of paint and smoke bombs.

(He’d been intending on a massive district wide prank to harass the chunnin patrols and Sakura spotted the more explosive seals before he could follow through. Instead most of the chunnin on patrol ended up dodging paint bombs for most of the week.)

(They still hadn’t found them all.)

"Oh!" Dropping her fist into the opposite hand Sakura brings up her true inspiration. "And, and! Tenten uses sealing scrolls! To fight! She keeps all her weapons, well most of her weapons - she’s got a lot - stored in this giant scroll at home and she says right now she’s not big enough to you that one. So she uses smaller and easier to handle scrolls. And its so cool Kaka-sensei! Its like 'oh you gonna fight a girl huh? think you’re tuff huh fighting a girl?' and then she just whips out these scrolls and BAM! Stabbed you thirty times. Its amazing!"

There were stars in Sakura's eyes as she talked about the older girl. Kakashi sighed quietly why were girls like this?

Finally making it to the training field Kakashi turns to look at the kid who’s up and rearing to go. God that hair was awful… she’d taken to wearing it up recently and hadn’t settled on a style yet. Today it was pulled back into two neat tailed buns. Ugh whatever he’d leave it up to her. Kakashi was the last person to criticize personal expression.

“Today you’re going to begin learning the basics of the tanto.” He tosses the girl one that’s old and from his childhood before he’d inherited his father’s. Why waste money on new things when old things worked just as well?

Sakura catches it and looks at the plain hilt and scabbard. Its nothing fancy but clearly well cared for. Unsheathing it she gets a good look at the blade itself, the craftsmanship in it is astounding even to her untrained eye.

Pointing at the glorified knife Kakashi intones “Don’t lose that, its worth more then you.”

Gulping Sakura quickly sheathes it and looks down at herself for a way to carry it. She’s not wearing a belt, turned out as she is in her standard dress, and her pouches and thigh holster wont work.

A leather holster is shoved practically into her face and it takes a minute (and some help from Kaka-sensei) before Sakura is standing at the ready; blade newly secured to her back.

With that Kakashi slowly works through everything she knows about bladed weapons specifically swords, short swords, various knives, and specifically the different types and uses of tantos. Its frustratingly short work as the only weapons Sakura has much experience with are her kunai and shuriken. And even there she isn’t an expert.

As they talk Kakashi guides her through learning how to unsheathe the blade without killing herself and the first few kata specifically for the weapon.

By the time the dogs pick up and head off to chase Naruto around the world and back, Sakura’s arms
are shaking. She’s already tired and exhausted from the unfamiliar exercises.

Kakashi had disappeared some time between calling it quits and Sakura dropping to the ground to contemplate her many many mistakes in life.

And then as if he forgot something Kakashi reappears leaning way to close into Sakura’s personal bubble to chirp “After missions tonight you and me, here. You’re going to learn how not to blow yourself up with tags.” And vanishes again.

Sasuke reappeared mid way through the day’s missions. The left side of his face is a riot of colors some of the bruising looking weeks old instead of only a day and change. He smells faintly of antiseptic and had the air of someone who’d been poked and prodded one too many times.

Fending off Naruto, Sasuke sets his jaw as he makes eye contact with Sakura. She feels guilty for the injury and cutting the training trip so short. They’d only been out for like a week and a half or something and she’d honestly thought the boy would dodge.

Wordless Sasuke joins his teammates in scrubbing Fukui-san’s floors. The mission goes off without a hitch and they accept another bundle of scrolls to complete before the day’s end.

Eventually they’ve caught Tora twice, walked the pack once (really Kaka-sensei? Really?), hunted down a specific cockroach for an eight-year-old, re-thatched a traditional food cart, and helped Momoto-san move crates from one side of his storage shed to the other.

(While walking the pack Naruto happily explained the extracurricular adventure he and Sasuke went on – only to discover that neither knew if sentient or sapient was the correct word for talking dogs. Naruto even dug his two books out of his spare weapons pouch, where he’d hidden them in a sealing scroll instead of useful things like bandages, to show Sakura the definitions. She didn’t know either and promised to help find out.)

Finally, it all came to a head when Sasuke sighed deeply and with feeling. More feeling then he typically liked to put into things. Naruto and Sakura distracted by word etymology turned to look at him on the third sigh.

Obviously he was looking for attention.

Catching Sakura’s gaze, he straightens up, hands at his side before bowing. Vaguely alarmed Sakura whips her head around trying to figure out what exactly is going on. Naruto’s eyes nearly bug out of his head at the display of politeness. He was raised in the gutter not some uncivilized ditch.

Standing straight Sasuke speaks “I’ve activated my sharingan from our spar. Thank you.”

The exceedingly formal language throws Sakura for a loop. Especially when paired with the announcement of the sharingan.

Floundering she nods accepting his thanks, internally screaming about clan formalities and how the hell is she suppose to reply. She doesn’t know that the activation of the sharingan during a spar or exercise with a comrade is seen as an auspicious event. And when the clan had existed massive celebrations would be held thanking the partner for such a favorable conclusion.

The moment ends (thankfully) by Naruto leaping at the other boy. Sasuke dodges and rudely ignores Naruto’s questions about the sharingan and what it does and what it looks like and what it even is.
Truth was, Sasuke had only developed the dojutsu in his right eye some point during his vaguely catatonic ride back to Konoha. The meds sending him on one hell of a trip that had the boy hallucinating his left eyeball falling out of the socket.

…Sometimes pain meds work and make things not hurt, but also not-not hurt at the same time. Either way the pain and trauma of getting you ass handed to you unexpectedly plus the drugs had the dojutsu manifesting. So far only one tomoe total but the specialist at the clinic told him to keep fighting and practicing and the second one (well the first in his left eye) should activate soon.

Instead of being legendary and amazing the kekkei genkai mostly made him dizzy and nauseous when using it. Also according to the specialist that would go away the more he used it.

It was a shit deal right now, figured Sasuke.

The specialist, Yamauchi Ryoko, own eyes had glinted at that one, her pupils dilating shockingly far, the iris stretching out and the sclera disappearing before her pupils abruptly shrunk into thin near nonexistent lines bisecting her eye.

The woman grinned and looked about a hundred times too large to fit in the room. All of her weight and presence bearing down on Sasuke. As if the world had been thrown across his shoulders and every person was jumping up and down all at once.

And then she blinked and said “You got a shit deal, Cateyes? That’s all I can do for about three seconds flat and then boom. Caput, nada for like a month sometimes.”

She seemed to pause thinking about it.

“You’re eyes could be the ruin of men, kid. Maybe that is a shit deal, but you’re in the business of ruining things aintcha?”

Ryoko then ruffled his hair and kicked him out of her office with an appointment in a week’s time.

While Team 7 ran around doing D-ranks Kakashi got reamed by the council for negligence of duty. Essentially the fact that the last Uchiha wasn’t going to be taking the chunnin exams was a big No-No and people were pissed. Mostly about the money that kid would bring in on ticket sales alone. Everyone knew who the Uchiha were and everyone wanted to see what the last loyal demon eyed dog of the leaf could do.

Honestly Kakashi thought he was in the clear because stage one was currently taking place one building over minus Team 7.

“For that matter, Hatake Kakashi, why have you chosen a first generation kunoichi as your apprentice? One that clearly lacks the ability to properly lead her team despite the responsibility she brought on herself?” Asked Utatane Koharu, clearly unimpressed with the latest crop of academy graduates.

Not wanting to admit he’d been conned into that whole apprenticeship thing Kakashi shrugged and dryly said “For a recent academy grad her mission load speaks for itself.”

The Third coughed and motioned for Iruka (who was working as an aide) to speak up. He did so grudgingly, not at all happy with Kakashi or the council or anyone involved with making babies take the chunnin exams.
“Haruno Sakura and her team have taken exactly two hundred and eighty-seven D-rank missions to date. They are also scheduled for six more today alone. It is also noted that Haruno Sakura has taken it upon herself to reach out to our,” Iruka made quotation marks with his free hand, “underground mission opportunities.”

Which of course were missions turned down by the official mission desk and shuffled off to be completed by someone not Konoha… well not officially. And just like sanctioned missions they also typically followed a standard rank. D and C ranks of this nature were typically submitted by people unsatisfied with the turnaround period and wanted their work completed quicker then the original quote.

Of course there was an actual black market in the streets but the council liked to pretend they didn’t know about it.

“Of the three hundred and nineteen missions we are aware of, Team Haruno has only failed to complete two, and had a delay on one.”

Iruka shuffles for a second before sitting back down. He said the important part and his… annoyance with the elders could be aired another time. Like in the streets near the clan districts since all of the current heirs minus like two, were competing in a sanctioned death match.

Koharu rolled her eyes at her old teammate for his shenanigans before shifting back in her chair.

“Mission load aside that doesn’t explain your actions Hatake-san.”

Kakashi shrugged, playing it cool. “Sakura is the only one of my students not already spoken for. Naruto by Jiraiya and Sasuke by the village. If anything I expect the council to be glad that my techniques won’t die with me.”

There was some shifting as the council took in the fact that Kakashi might be doing this on purpose? Not just being an ass about it? (Oh no he was being an ass. But he’d accidentally walked himself into an ironclad apprenticeship when he’d tried to get more then… reasonable from the Haruno family.)

Danzo, spotting an opening, spoke up. “If that is true then shouldn’t it be to the discretion of this council to decide the fate of the Uchiha boy?” He shifted to direct this next bit at the Hokage, “Hand him over so that he can be made into the weapon Konoha desperately needs.”

“Ahh… Sasuke is growing with his team, separating them wouldn’t be for the best right now. Besides one of them helped him activate his…s uh,” oh fuck no Kakashi why did you have to open your dumbass mouth?

“The last of our Uchiha has finally activated his birthright? And you intend on keeping him from the exams? Outrageous! We must have a showing of force this year!” Danzo used his good hand to stamp his cane a few times to make a point.

“Which one of his teammates did this?” Asked Mitokada Homura speaking up for the first time this session. A rarity honestly, he’d always been a little bit of chatterbox.

“…Haruno Sakura,” Kakashi admitted this as if condemning his student to the gallows. Which was probably accurate because Hiruzen took that instant to cough again and motion for Iruka to speak up.

“Haruno Sakura since graduation has come into at least two known altercations with Hyuuga Neji. Besting or fighting to what they call a draw. Since her graduation and removal of certain… elements in her day to day life she shows promise in adapting to the shinobi lifestyle, generally unheard of in first generation genin.”
Those elements being the other first generation civilian born children in the academy. Sure the majority of them graduated, the rest sent off to become non-com support, but they weren’t the types of influences a growing ninja needed when teamed with two of the most important children the village had ever produced.

She was also supposed to be utterly unremarkable and not a distraction from her team.

That clearly wasn’t how it was going.

“Has she really? Impressive. Will this… effect the further evolution of the sharingan?” asked Homura. It wasn’t exactly a secret that typically the activation of the kekkei genkai was tied to the emotional wellbeing (or physical… Same thing) of an outsider’s influence of the wielder.

Thinking back to the drooling drugged kid with a magic eyeball spinning around that Kakashi had just lugged back into the village, Kakashi shrugged and offered a light “Sure will!” Because he didn’t have a clue honestly.

Ryoko-san had explained the activation as a self defense mechanism because the boy had thought he was going to lose his other eye.

“Fantastic! Its decided then! Team 7 will take the place of Team 83 and participate from the second stage onwards! Kakashi – make sure your students understand exactly what that means. Dismissed.” The Third elatedly declared. Who decided that??? Kakashi must have missed it.

Iruka made a face and a ‘I’m watching you’ motion as Kakashi left.

Kakashi flashed a peace sign and ignored the growl he got in return.

On his way out the door he overheard the council arguing over ticket pricing to see the last Uchiha fight with his sharingan.

“Alright little apprentice. Time to learn how to get the fuck out of the way before you burn and die.”

Kakashi paused before whipping the tag at the girl as if just remembering something. (He didn’t he just wanted to be a dramatic asshole.)

“Oh yeah you and the boys are being shoehorned into the chunnin exams so get to training ground 44 at 0400 tomorrow.”

“Wha- Kaka-sensei, no wait – WAIT!”

“Move those feet before you lose them!”

Chapter End Notes

Still no beta maybe no beta ever idk (actually my roomie betas for me if i beg enough but she always gives me this Look and I'm just like fine u can read it tomorrow... and then a month goes by so here we are)
Also can you tell I've gotten hurt a couple of times in my life?? It is Not Fun. And i feel like that meme but "sometimes the good drugs... are worse" ya know?? idk i always just felt super loopy and ouchie (literally a word i used repeatedly when i crushed my pelvis. the emt thought me-on-morphine was hilarious once they established i probably wasn't about to die on the gurney)

Word of the wise getting punched and breaking your nose sucks but getting punched and breaking other parts of your face is WORSE

hahaha i had a BUNCH of questions the last chapter specifically about things that were happening in This chapter and dont worry guys it might not seem like i have a plan but i doooool

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE COMMENTS AND KUDOS THEY MAKE MY WORLD GO ROUND
its official I'm only fueled by love at this point。・゚ヾ

I also have a tumblr if ur interested in any of my ramblings about other things or random meta posts TheForceIsStrongInTheGirl
Team 83 had no strong opinions on being swept out of the exams so suddenly. They took their hush money and stood for test photos. Designed to be your average team, generic in every way they went practically unnoticed next to all the oddities sent from other countries. Exactly what Konoha was counting on.

The Chunin Exams were ultimately a time for each village to showcase their best and brightest in a way that not only earned them prestige but money. By sending a ‘loud’ team to the competition future clients would see what each village had to offer and choose accordingly when hiring. Usually while a client might be remembering that one kid that ate the other kids finger when commissioning a Village they often times got the run of the mill professional shinobi who did not in-fact earn their promotion by showing all of their skills to the world.

Instead they got the filler. The shinobi who took up the slack and walked in the shadows of giants. As the hosting village Konoha had to make a showing of sending in a massive number of genin, even if most of them were picked solely to wash out and allow flashier candidates to progress.

There was some solid money in it for those teams as well. Especially if they made a racket on the way out the door.

So Team 83 knew they wouldn’t be progressing beyond the second stage and were happy to hand off the rains to the death trap that was training ground 44 to someone else.

Team 7 on the other hand wished that their introduction to the exams hadn’t come a day late because they weren’t just entering it as themselves, they had to convincingly be enough like someone else to pull off suddenly appearing at the end of stage two.

While walking to the setting of the second stage the kids were whisked off by a couple of Konoha chunnin to be prepped for the forest.

It was met with complaining from Naruto and a vicious glare from Sasuke, both of whom had been rudely awoken two hours earlier by their wild eyed captain with her new knife strapped to back. Sakura had torn into Sasuke’s apartment (Naruto didn’t really live at his apartment at all anymore, Sakura had plans but they could wait for now) whisper yelling they needed to prep for the second stage of the chunnin exams. Neither boy had really believed her and Sasuke had tried to go back to sleep until Sakura, panicked and stressed, threw her mug of coffee at the boy. It was an instinctual reaction usually targeted at Naruto but the chunnin exams was where people went to die and get eaten by weird foreign ninja. It was allowed.

They were lead to a ‘secret’ room under the Academy and forced into styling chairs while a series of older infiltration specialists did their magic. Maki Ohta was not pleased to have his infiltration specialization used to sneak a couple of brats into the exams on such short notice and wasn’t subtle about it as the trio tested his patience throughout the ordeal. (None of the kids noticed because they figured most grumpy people were just like that all the time and that it wasn’t related to them.)

The kids needed to look like themselves, abet dirty and gross, by the end of the second stage which meant all of the cosmetic changes about to be done had to be extremely temporary.
Sakura and Naruto were forced to have their bright eye catching hair darkened with oils and temporary coloring.

Sakura endured it in silence, her hair combed out into a soft chestnut that would look simply grungy like she had fallen in mud and hadn’t managed to wash it all out by the end of the week. (Totally possible in the Forest of Death.) It was then pulled into a gentle ponytail at the base of her neck and her bangs were pinned back out of the way. Her forehead protector, for once, was placed in the correct spot.

Naruto whined and wiggled as the comb caught on the abundance of knots and tangles disguised under his usual wild look. His hair was also weirdly resistant to taking the dye and eventually the chunnin gave up and took Naruto outside to rub mud directly onto the brat’s head.

Sasuke gloated at only having his hair roughly scraped back into a tight topknot until he realized it was a rough appropriation of Kimura Kayo from Team 83’s look, and that he would be masquerading as a girl for a few days.

Naruto had laughed and pointed at the other boy until Ohta-senpai swatted him, fed up with his nonsense.

(Sakura had fallen asleep in her chair and was letting the stylists do as they pleased. She’d had a long night and Kakashi had to take her to a medic, to treat some burns, before she’d been allowed home.)

Since Team 83 existed as a filler squad they specifically went out of their way to cultivate a look of uniformity that wouldn’t stand out among the rest of the rank and file. Soft greens and deep blues just like the standard fatigues of higher ranked shinobi were favored by the team. The only specialized look among the squad was their favored chest pieces. In a rough approximation of the amour worn by the elite head hunters team 83 had scoured nearly all the second-hand weapon shops in the Village searching for the vests. (And something affordable on a genin budget.)

Since Team 7 was supposed to be Team 83 and no one had time to go find genuine second hand vests, the brats got vests pulled out of the jounin lost and found. Thankfully the box was never emptied so there were quite a few tiny vests from back in the day when the Village was a little laxer on promoting children at an insane speed.

While they were being made into other people the team was briefed on the events of the first stage (well Naruto and Sasuke were, Sakura was asleep still). Essentially it was decided among the boys and Hagane Kotetsu (who was in charge of the briefing because he lost a thumb wrestling match) that Sasuke cheated with his sharingan, Naruto slept through the exam because he figured he’d pass with sheer determination and because he didn’t realize the point was to cheat.

“Wha – wait… but Iruka-sensei always got mad if we cheated… I don't get it…” clearly the plan was well thought out for each child’s specific personality.

When Kotetsu brought up Sakura both boys cut him off with a firm “She didn’t cheat she just answered all of them.” from Sasuke and a shrugged “Sakura-chan’s smart she ‘ prolly just did it, ya know?” from Naruto. They decided to leave it at that.

It took nearly four hours of prep work but by the end of it team 7 looked just enough like someone else that they could convincingly play it out as a “My sensei wanted me to lie low so I didn’t die during the exams.”

Therefore, at 0800 hours when Shikamaru caught sight of a remarkably average team lurking on the edges of the crowd trying to avoid notice he did a double take wondering how the hell someone had
convinced Sasuke to dress like that. He then resolved not to ask and *not* to point it out to Ino. Quickly walking in the other direction to ensure she didn’t catch sight of it. (Her Sasuke radar had gotten lax in the last few months and needed to stay that way.)

Once all the genin squads had been released into the wild team 7 took some time to regroup and find a nice hiding place, high up in the trees. So far up, in fact, that they had unfiltered sunlight dappling their faces unlike closer to the ground where it was always dark and gloomy.

This meant the kids had close encounter with a bear in its natural habitat before it dropped out of the trees to land on unsuspecting victims. (Untrue the bear was lurking that high specifically to drop on people but typically lived in a nice hollowed out log on the forest floor not the canopy.)

Scuttling backwards, too scared to make noise, the team watched as the bear decided not to eat them and instead flopped its massive weight on a passing Mist candidate. Squishing them to death.

From a safe distance the team watched the Bear (new respect for their food chain superior) eat the kid.

“Do… bears eat people?”

“Clearly this one does.”

“But… augh this place is scary why are we even here!!”

“…we should go…”

They didn’t and waited until the Bear had its fill and wandered off, a bag around its neck, to search what was left to see if it was going to be that easy to get their scroll.

No scroll and bloody hands later had the kids huffing in frustration, they hadn’t seen another soul for hours and finding people in this clusterfuck was going to be a nightmare. (They also hadn’t moved in hours so that was their own fault.)

“Maybe,” Sasuke paused to organize his thoughts. “Maybe it’s in the bag…”

“The Bear took our scroll?! That bastard!” Naruto punched his own palm in frustration and had to shake it out.

“Should we even risk that?” Sakura was the only reasonable one.

As one they decided no, they shouldn’t risk it and set out to find someone to jump and rob.

Eventually they admitted defeat and clustered together to form a plan better then the usual one (attack!).

“We should split up and do some recon and meet back here in two hours.” Said Sakura decisively. She’d been thinking about how to best find someone, anyone, in this damn forest for hours.

“Fine. But we need a password. Something that no one could just guess.” Said Sasuke. When the other two leaned in for the code he told them a long jumbled ridiculous password that took too long
to say or even remember (Naruto’s opinion, Sakura who regularly liked to have tongue twister competitions with the pack got it instantly).

“No! No no no! It should be something super easy that we only know for real! Like – uh, like how many of Pakkun-sensei’s toe pads are, are pink!” Naruto was going to fight for this because he wasn’t gonna remember that thing Sasuke said and knew his own weaknesses.

“Ohhh… yeah that is a good one… Wow Naruto who knew you had it in you.” Nodded Sakura, it was this weird thing Pakkun did as an award but somehow super satisfying to touch his toe beans anyways. So they all definitely knew how to answer it without discussion.

With that they split off and headed their own directions (“Quit following me you bastard! I’m going this way first!”) with only minor fanfare.

---

Naruto was not having a great time. Not only had he not gotten the chance to have an epic battle complete with dramatic monologs and catchy one liners, so far the only thing he’d found definitely in this terrible terrible place was cacti when he’d lost his footing and landed on a cluster.

Why was there even cacti here?! Konoha was a temperate climate according to that huuuuuge book he’d gotten. It had all kinds of weird information they never taught at the academy that, personally, Naruto thought would be super helpful! Like how countries work and have things like different governments and shit! Like its was all super complicated and it had all kinds of things Naruto had never thought about before!

Like the trees around Konoha were the biggest in the whole world! Because Konoha was just that cool! Except it wasn’t cool even though the winters are always terrible and the heat never worked right and Naruto never had the right clothes… anyways That was apparently a ‘mild’ winter! Naruto hated to know what a spicy winter was in that case.

Like mild food was usually ok but sometimes food gets a little too spicy, ya know? Old man Teuchi never did that though, it was always the exact perfect amount of flavor every time! It was so awesome he did that…

Anyways there was no reason for a bunch of ugly pointy cacti to be growing here. And it wasn’t even Naruto’s fault he landed on them. Or was it cactus… that big ‘ol book swapped between both words a lot… Still! They shouldn’t have ambushed him like that! Naruto didn’t mean to attack the plants but he thought they were the enemy!

He stopped as soon as he realized and he even apologized! Sakura-chan and Pakkun-sensei had been getting onto him about manners recently and he was trying super hard to get better at it. But it was all so complicated and dumb and didn’t make any sense at all… Like he knew the basics of it and since it was his fault since the cacti(us?) were just plants and all so he should apologize but they stuck him with thorns and needles and shit!

Where was Naruto’s apology?!

Whatever… Naruto was still pulling spines out of his skin and clothes when he wandered back to the meeting point. It looked like he was the first one back too. Which meant either the other two were dead or had gotten into epic battles without Naruto.

Not sure which was worse Naruto sat down to wait.
And then immediately flung himself sideways to avoid a kunai.

Squawking Naruto leapt up pulling his own kunai.

“Oi! Oi, oi! What the fuck attacking a guy sitting down?! What kinda shithead does that come out ‘n fight like a man!” Naruto was hollering and waving his own blade around like a fool when Sasuke looking like a girl and not really like Sasuke at all popped out of the bush the blade came from.

Both boys had a moment of silence before Naruto pointed at Sasuke with his knife yelling “Bastard! You tried to kill me! What’s the password! ‘Cause Sasuke might try to kill me sometimes so I can’t tell if it you or not-you!”

The possible not-Sasuke scoffed and crossed his arms and demanded in return “How do I know you’re Naruto then. You didn’t even ask for the password right. Maybe that just means you’re the fake!”

Another moment passed.

“Well uh. Uh what – no wait. How many of Pakkun-sensei’s toes are pink then!?” yelled Naruto inching closer to attack just incase it wasn't (or was) Sasuke. Either way it was about to go down.

“All of them asshole.” Sasuke also bucked up ready for the fight now that it was established both boys were who they said they were.

There was a reflexive silence as they waited to get yelled at by team boss Sakura.

When nothing happened both boys glanced around fight forgotten.

“Do ya think the Bear got her or did she get the Bear?”

Sakura was running for her life. She wasn’t exactly sure where she was headed but it was definitely away. She’d been innocently minding her own business when she dropped (entirely on accident) into a battle between two genin squad candidates, one set from Kirigakure the other Iwagakure.

So sudden was her arrival that all persons froze for a moment (not great for future promotions honestly) as Sakura shuffled for a second.

“Well… seems like you’re all busy so Imma go…” and turned around to just book it out of there.

That must have set the other teams off because the creepy Stone team (now that she thought about it there were only two Mist shinobi here maybe that other one she’d seen get eaten was the teammate?) managed to mangle the two Mist nin before charging after the pink target.

Sakura who really did not want to fight without back up, ran off. She had only just begun to figure out using her chakra to augment her speed but it was half instinctual and she wasn’t great at control yet. So she was practically flying through the trees at this point, branches and leaves and vines whipping against her face.

Speed wasn’t helping her stay quiet and she was mostly hoping to just out run instead of having to out fight.

And then suddenly as if in slow motion a shadow fell over the girl, rapidly shrinking in size.

Her head snapped up so fast Sakura possibly gave herself whiplash and screamed at the site of the massive Bear, wearing a bag, dropping from above. In that moment powered by nothing but fear and
screams Sakura slammed a burst of pure chakra down her legs and her body jerked forward so quickly with a photo-shunshin that she went clean through a dead tree eight meters ahead.

From the sounds of it the Stone nin that had been closing in on her ran straight into the bear.

Kicking debris off Sakura sat up and nearly skewered herself on a sword. Looking up along the length of the blade she made direct eye contact with one of the Stone nin. She was tall and mean looking with blood smeared across the bridge of her nose and down one cheek.

“Give up your scroll before you die.” Said the woman.

“Eh? That’s not even a good threat dumb-ahhhh I mean I don’t have it!” Sakura started at a sneering shout and ended in a meek near whisper. Honestly antagonizing a girl with a sword to your face was a bad thing kids. Don’t do that at home.

Actually this was Sakura’s home. She could do whatever she wanted. Deciding to take initiative Sakura dropped like dead weight off the branch they’d been on and fell in a sweeping arc to the forest floor. The Stone woman leaping after her.

Twisting like a cat, just like Pakkun-sensei said to, Sakura caught the edge of a tree with the very tips of her fingers and used her chakra to change her trajectory so that she was flying back up and passed the other girl. She used that moment of shock to kick a foot out and make contact with the enemy’s chest. Sakura could hear the huff of air being knocked out of the girl and grinned even if she couldn’t see it.

Landing on the trunk of a massive oak Sakura scuttled around the side like a lizard using her hands and toes. Focusing so intently on the bark in front of her nose she almost scuttled headfirst into another stone nin.

This one a boy who had managed to pull himself – minus a chunk of leg – away from the Bear and to a mildly safer place. He had tears in his eyes from the pain of loosing a piece of his leg and leaving his teammate for dead. She’d been hit by the Bear straight on and it snapped her neck with its weight.

He didn’t try anything just stared blankly at Sakura for a long second and Sakura stared back at the crying boy.

She wasn’t sure if she had ever seen a boy cry like this before. It wasn’t angry tears or tears of frustration. It was grief and pain and suffering and Sakura could feel her heart go out to him.

He was the enemy but he was just a kid just like she was. The world really wasn’t fair sometimes. Sakura shifted backwards prepared to scuttle the other direction and pretend like she hadn’t seen the boy when she was kicked harshly in the side.

Sakura rolled sideways, which was actually down the trunk - yay gravity works – and managed to catch herself to avoid the kunai thrown at her head.

The tall scary lady was back and looking mad. The woman advanced on Sakura, who was in no position to avoid or retaliate, the intent to finish her kill colored her eyes and flashed on her teeth.

Sakura could feel it in the air pressing down and trying to hold. As if a million little hands were reaching up and grasping at the hems of her sleeves.

Her heart pounded in her ears and Sakura could only faintly hear the boy say “Stop! Stop Kyo! Aki is dead! It doesn’t matter anymore!”
Kyo only spit and kept advancing. Sakura had only just thought about dropping the chakra connection to the tree and free falling only for Kyo to vanish before her eyes and appear lower on the tree directly underneath Sakura’s fall.

The sword was coming up and the boy was yelling and Sakura was falling right into it and somehow she managed to pull that tanto Kakashi-sensei had leant her and push the sword away and fall into Kyo.

There was a soft gasping noise in Sakura ear. It was wet and gross and smelled faintly of copper and iron and sesame.

She was falling and falling and then the world stopped moving for a long moment.

Sakura lay there for a minute horrified before jerking up and inadvertently jerking the tanto out of Kyo’s chest. The girl wasn’t breathing. There was blood pooling but it wasn’t gushing or being pumped out anymore.

There was blood on Sakura’s hands and arms and chest and in her hair and on her cheek.

Kyo, the scary girl with the sword from Iwagakure, was dead.

And Sakura who didn’t know what to do still holding her bloody tanto in her hand reached out with the other and closed the dead girl’s eyes.

She flinched when the boy’s voice called out to her.

“Just leave Konoha-girl. We are done… I need to take my teammates home. Please just go.”

His words were utterly heartbroken and Sakura didn’t know how to feel. She just felt numb.

Turning to look up at the boy she nodded slowly then stood. Taking a step back and then another Sakura bowed to Kyo’s body. Low and formal for a long time. She didn’t say anything and the boy didn’t interrupt.

Straightening up she turned to go pausing to listen to the boy.

“Konoha-girl you, you won. Our scroll... You have to take it in and finish the exam with it now. You killed my team. You have to do this.”

“Alright,” Sakura whispered, “where is it?”

“I think the bear ate it.”

“...”

Sakura closed her eyes and breathed deep at that. She had to do this now. She killed a girl for it. Best to follow through.

“I think it ate most of... of, it just. It was so big...” The boy trailed off mumbling to himself, tears streaming freely. (Growing up in the mountains, bears were a legitimate danger but chakra fed forest monsters where something else entirely.)

“What’s your name?” Asked Sakura who didn’t know how to leave or what to do.

The boy was wiping at his tears, and Sakura who was far enough away not to see the details barely caught the quiet “Why do you want to know Konoha-girl. You killed my team. You, you kil-“
before he started crying so hard the air got stuck in his lungs and the tears and snot mixed into a terrible paste on his chin.

Sakura left the hyperventilating boy and his dead teammates behind.

Naruto and Sasuke where fairly well hidden in some giant leaves and trying to work out a game plan because it had been officially three hours and Sakura still hadn’t turned up.

“Maybe… we should go find her?” Nauro was picking at his nails with a senbon and Sasuke was seriously considering bumping his arm and watching the fallout of Naruto denailing himself.

“Sure.” Maybe it wasn’t worth it, Naruto was really loud and Sasuke had an inkling that his nail would just grow back by morning.

“Ahh… but if Sakura-chan comes back and we aren’t here she’s gonna be pissed…” Naruto was picking at his teeth now with the same senbon.

“…We should stay here.” That was super gross and Sasuke was positive he hadn’t even wiped it off.

Wouldn’t fingernail grit taste bad? …Maybe it was only ear wax that tastes bad. If anyone would know it would be Naruto.

“Hey, dumbass, did you even clean that? Doesn’t it taste gross?” Naruto paused to glance at Sasuke, mouth open comically wide with the needle shoved against a molar.

“Uhhhh,” Naruto pulled the deadly weapon out of his mouth to answer without accidentally preforming oral surgery.

“I dunno it tasted kinda like dirt. Why?”

He answered! Sasuke, floored by the honest and straight forward answer, turned slightly towards the other boy to ask another one.

“Disgusting, do you also use that to clean out your ears?”

Naruto’s face scrunched up at that.

“Ew that’s gross! Ear wax is nasty! Super gross!” Maxing an X with his arms Naruto denied it before shifting and pulling out a different senbon, holding the two different weapons up.

“This one is for ear wax! This one is for, uh, nails? And stuff?” Squinting at the identical needles Sasuke glanced between them and the dirty (as in literal mud) blond.

Narrowing his gaze Sasuke unintentionally activated his sharingan temporarily causing double vision and making his stomach roll. Even with the demon eye he couldn’t tell the difference between them.

“How do you know… which one is which?” This was a pressing question, if the sharingan couldn’t tell then there was no way Naruto could, and that meant he’d eaten ear wax recently.

Naruto frowned at this, peering at Sasuke as if he was the idiot.

“Do ya, do ya really wanna know?”
He actually did so Sasuke, Sharingan still active in just that one eye, nodded and leaned forward.

Narutos eyes darted around before, he too, leaned forward.

“Ok, ok its super, super secret but this senbon I stole from a creepy mask ninja guy and its got a little teeny tiny mark riiiiight here.” Naruto pointed at an invisible speck of nothing.

Disappointed Sasuke leaned back.

“No no look! If ya touch it, it like shocks you! Or something.” And to prove his point he touched the speck of nothing.

Nothing happened.

Grinning Naruto held the senbon out for Sasuke to try. Shrugging and with nothing left to lose Sasuke touched the speck.

What the fucking shit that piece of shit shocked him?!

Gaping at the needle Sasuke poked it again only to be shocked once more.

It didn’t really hurt, mostly it just felt like a light static shock but there was no way the same piece of metal could do that every time in a row.

Going in for another poke Naruto pulled the needle back.

“Hey, hey can’t use it all up! ‘Sides…” Here Naruto sent Sasuke that weird creepy grin that meant he was up to something.

“I stole a buncha things from those creepy mask ninja dudes. They all do that but its different for each one! Wanna see?”

Sasuke did want to see and leaned back in.

A chunnin watched the image on the screen completely enthralled and slightly grossed out. He’d been using a bird-cam for the last day to follow this girl and so far it hadn’t disappointed. (He did have to swap from a squirrel-cam earlier when it got eaten by a passing snake. It was pure absolute luck that a cam had managed to stay on the girl as long as it had. They tended to be eaten or otherwise destroyed fairly quickly in the Forest.)

The girl was a nightmare, a gory horrific nightmare, that few of the candidates had managed in the single day of stage 2. That Suna kid had, but other then that it had been a fairly tame if slightly crowded test.

If anyone had mentioned that to the kids in the forest they would have lost their damn minds because the Forest of Death was a nightmare already. In the weeks previous there had been a sudden jump in B and then C ranked missions handed out among the Chunnin Corps for some gardening and landscaping. It would be another month before the training ground righted itself and came back to its natural balance of murder everything that breathes.

A slow grin stretched across the chunnin's face as he paused and saved one particular image. This was a fucking gold mine and he couldn’t wait to see the faces of those self-righteous jounin sensei’s when he posted it. (Akio was going to shit a brick when the image finally got around to the
overworked ninja turned probation officer's desk.)

The image printed with no problem and the chunnin practically skipped out of the room and followed the winding tunnel out of the forest.

Not only did the forest originally double as a lookout and a massive defense of the eastern boarder of the newly formed village, way back in the day, but it now made for an impressive hiding place of all kinds of secrets and mysteries.

Acting as a solid chakra sink the forest was actively producing and consuming raw chakra at a near alarming rate – that every single tree still standing from their creation with the mokudon did the same thing made it less alarming to the locals, foreign ninja shuddered at the lingering power of the first Hokage− had it not been for the benefits for the village the entire place would have been razed decades ago.

Interfering heavily with any sort of imaging was one such benefit. If everyone knew there was an important tower, in the middle of the scary woods, that was so useless now in the modern age Konoha used it for examinations, who was going to look any farther?

The suspicious, of course, would and they’d find a network of tunnels that went nowhere because the living, chakra using, forest broke through and tried to eat everyone.

Underneath that was an entirely separate tunnel system that could be used to travel anywhere within the forest or directly outside to a few key and discreet locations. One of which was the jounin lounge.

Those dickheaded self inflated headache causing shitheads hated it when a 44th patrol member popped out of a false tile in the left corner of the room so that’s exactly what was done on this important mission to win some money and annoy those assholes.

Grinning the man saluted the random nin in the room, he recognized a few from here or there but also wasn’t on friendly terms with them so he didn’t stop to chat.

Pinning the picture, he stepped back to admire his work. Front and center no one would miss this mess. Behind him he could hear a sharp inhale, something tight and worried and something unknown but delightful to the chunnin all the same. He still decided to book it out of there before the fighting started.

In the lounge the jounin of the Konoha rookie teams couldn’t take their eyes off of the image of Haumo Sakura field dressing a bear.

She was liberally coated with blood, to the point that her early morning makeover was impossible to notice. Her hair still in that low tail was a mess of leaves and twigs while the rest of the girl was that dirty red of drying blood.

She was leaning into the bear’s abdominal cavity to properly remove the internal organs. The animal was so large it was going to take the girl a long time to work through the process. None of the jounin had the slightest understanding of why the girl would go through the trouble. It wasn’t like there weren’t other things to eat in the woods.

Either way Asuma handed over a wad of crumpled bills that Kakashi counted thoroughly before holding his hand out again for the rest.

Kurenai was tapping at her chin before nodding to herself.
“It probably ate someone and the scroll.”

The men paused to glance at Kurenai.

“Bears… eat people?” Asked Asuma who had never encountered a bear in his entire life somehow.

Kakashi, who had encountered bears when he was a tiny six-year-old bite sized snack, had a flashback to pointy teeth before shaking himself.

“They sure do.” Kurenai answered without elaborating. She’d seen some shit in her day and if Asuma got some special privilege for being the Hokage’s boy then he could shove it up his ass – no she wasn’t bitter about anything ever. Don’t ask.

Asuma tried to catch Kakashi’s eye for support but was on the wrong side for it and had to turn his attention back to the image pinned to the bulletin board. He really hoped that Ino had forgotten about that dumb grudge of hers and didn’t try to pick a fight later.

The four-foot something speck of a girl was nothing compared to the eighteen-foot monster produced by the Forest of Death. And seeing it strung up, bled, and half gutted by that same little girl with pink hair under the blood was frightening for all the things that single image didn’t say. It would be a suckers bet that the image hadn’t hit the ground running outside of the exam or that most of Konoha wouldn’t have seen it by the time stage 3 came around.

It was sitting on the daimyo’s desk by morning the next day, he made sure to RSVP his ticket for the big match next month. So did a large number of important people who always got invited but tended to stay home and not bother with the latest crop of ninja. This was too good an opportunity to pass up.

Orochimaru, masquerading as the Kazekage, flew into a rage the second he realized that girl in the image was the confirmed teammate of one Uchiha Sasuke. Which meant the boy had been right there under his nose and out of the careful eye of Konoha for over a week (so long as one was careful to destroy any cameras and other bugs before revealing oneself)! Kabuto was a dead man the second he showed his lying useless face.

Twenty-seven teams entered the Forest of Death and a week later only seven teams passed. Just over the threshold of genin expected to compete in the final stage of the exams, Konoha was set to hold a preliminary round to weed out any undesirables. Though it would never be framed that way the prelims were heavily staged. Candidates who would earn their keep in ticket sales, often times, were given a sure fight while candidates who might not leave the best impression with future clients were forced, one way or another, to lose or drop out of the race entirely.

Clans began campaigning for their shinobi’s advancement into the third stage months in advance if given enough warning that a specific team would be competing. Sometimes a clan paid the weight of their genin in gold for a specific opponent during the preliminaries (should they be held and the candidate makes it. It was non-refundable.).

There were two such matches this go around; Hyuuga Hinata the heiress of the last dojutsu dynasty vs her cousin of the branch family Hyuuga Neji, and Yamanaka Ino vs her loudly proclaimed rival Haruno Sakura.

The first match was to ensure weakness did not embarrass the powerful clan, the second to placate a doted daughter lamenting a rival who never seemed to be around when she wanted to fight.
Then the picture of Haruno Sakura and the Bear made its rounds and anyone with a few yen to spare found their favored bookie and sat back to enjoy the show.

Chapter End Notes

still no beta... probably never a beta again lol

THANK YOU ALL FOR THE LOVE AND COMMENTS IT MAKES MY DAY AND MAKES WRITING SO MUCH EASIER!!!!!!!! i have had a hell of a week and wanted to get this posted before my life implodes with more nonsense lol dont worry i have the next chapter in the works but it'll probably take a second to finish up (I ALSO HAVE ANOTHER NARUTO FIC THATS GOING TO HAPPEN)

i know I'm drifting away from the crack taken serious here but i wanted to do that to highlight the severity of the chapter. it will come back dont worry about that, this fic is ultimately written to make people laugh and it gives me such a thrill when people let me know that it worked!!!!!

(ironically i almost broke my nose last thurday and have got one hell of a bruise so anyways I'm once again reminded of how much face injuries hurt)
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Before the rigged matches could run the teams had to make it to the tower in the first place.

The squad from Suna strolled in the first day and broke a minor international record. Nearly 12 hours later Team 7 walked in dazed and dirty.

When Sakura had eventually turned up, four and a half hours past the time, to the boys looking vaguely guilty and a metric ton of weapons scattered about she hadn’t even sighed. She just held out her pilfered scroll and tried to hand it off. Neither boy wanted to touch it and elected to have Sakura be the keeper of scrolls from now on.

They hadn’t even asked for the password, the slackers.

Iruka had a minor conniption at the sight of Sakura doused in blood and looking faintly shell shocked as if she had spent months in the Forest – at full strength that is – not about 15 or so hours. Her teammates were edging away occasionally when they thought she wouldn’t notice. The girl smelled really, really bad.

Worse then the sewers bad. Or that one time with the outhouse. Or the time with the pigs. Or even that time the academy taught the class how to skin and dress a rabbit.

Iruka fighting to keep a straight face lead the team into the building and the rooms set aside for any squads that happened to complete the task with enough time to spare.

Pushing open the door Iruka gestured for the team to wait a second.

“Don’t leave the tower, you finished the test and going back out would be similar to allowing you to take an exam over again. This is your room, there’s a bathroom and a kitchenette, but you are welcome to use the cafeteria. Keep an eye out for any other teams. This is a ‘safe zone’ but its always best to keep your guard up.”

He turned to let the kids past then paused to turn back stopping their entry once again. Sakura almost walked into the teacher. The boys did not almost walk into Sakura – they were staying out of range.

Emotions, more then any of the pre-teens knew how to deal with, shone in the chunnin’s eyes.

“I’m just so proud of you, all of you. This is, its so impressive. And I was so worried for you, especially you Naruto.”

Sasuke nudged Naruto at that. What a baby, having people worry about him. (Sasuke didn’t want to think about the wobbly feeling at being included in that little speech.)

“You’re, you… All of you are going to be amazing shinobi one day!”

Sakura, the closest, reached out to tentatively pat the emotional ninja. It worked on dogs and her teammates it should work on Iruka-sensei. (Her hand kinda stuck to Iruka’s sleeve, he was too busy being emotional about the babies surviving to care right then.)

Maybe she should try it on Kaka-sensei next time something happened.
“Don’t worry Iruka-sensei! I’m gonna be the best! And, and Sakura’s already pretty cool ya know. Sasuke’s ok… I guess.” Naruto said, trying to lighten the mood.

Sniffling conspicuously Iruka stepped to the side and shot Naruto a grin and a thumbs up at the boy’s enthusiastic response.

“We already are shinobi…” Sasuke grumbled even if he did manage a nod of acceptance at Iruka-sensei. Next time he got sent to the hospital Sasuke officially had two and a half adults that could sign off on care. (Sakura counted as a half because no one had met her parents yet…)

Sakura meanwhile marched herself right through the dorm door intent on heading straight for the nearest shower only to be waylaid by their current sensei.

Kakashi was slouched in the center of the room after deciding that lurking near the door was weird and lounging on one of the beds was even worse. (He’d gone through about eight different poses before deciding to stick with a classic.) Holding up a hand Kakashi went to flash a peace sign and a light ‘yo’ but was stopped by Sakura.

She walked right up to him staring blankly into space. Her toes were basically touching Kakashi’s toes which meant she was way, way too close. Sakura’s right hand darted out to grab onto Kakashi’s abandoned peace sign. Her eyes snapped up determinedly.

“Kaka-sensei I want to talk to Pakkun-sensei. Its important. I killed a bear. And a girl. I really need to talk to him.”

The moment hung in the air like the ripe stench of perforated bowels (Sakura had been… thorough searching for the scroll).

“Ahhh…” Stalling Kakashi’s one eye darted around slightly panicked as he yanked his fingers away.

“Why don’t you shower… a few times and I’ll summon the pack? But shower first!”

Sakura, mistrustful, squinted up at the jounin for a second before nodding. He’d have Pakkun by the time she was done. It wasn’t a sure, sure thing. But Sakura was pretty sure of it anyways. She made her way to the bathroom and sighed lovingly at the bath before snapping the door shut firmly.

In the room Kakashi was surreptitiously wiping his hand off on his vest as Naruto waved his hand in front of his nose trying to breathe through his mouth. Sasuke walked to the window, hopeful, and sighed when it proved to be neither a window (some sort of painting into the wall?) or anything that would allow fresh air.

“Well… good job surviving the Forest of Death. Sakura did all the hard work so that’s really all I can say to you. Here’s an air-freshener. Take ten.”

Holding out a few air circulation seals Kakashi searched for anything to say. Neither boy looked impressed with him, eyes darting from his outstretched hand to his singular eye and back.

Oh that was right Sasuke had no idea Kakashi was the Copy-Nin and had the sharingan and that was why he was their teacher! He could tell them that!

…actually best to wait on that one.

“You do know how to use seals, right?” Maybe he should poke at them some more. That comment about Sakura didn’t rile them up nearly (not at all) as much as he expected.
“Of course we do.” Sasuke snatched the stack and handed it off to Naruto to place. The mud blond had a running commentary as he darted around to set the seals.

“Yeah yeah, who do ya thank we are?! Seals are super easy sensei! Like, uhm one time me ‘n Sakura, well it was just me and then Sakura stole them, anyways we got the chunnin corps real good and like, half of that was all seal work! I mean I didn’t make them, but I figured it out! And Sakura too! You saw that explosion!”

The seals didn’t really need to be spread out but it was interesting watching Naruto dart about. His placement was interesting and uniquely different then it would have been not even a month ago. Maybe it was that huge book Naruto kept lugging around for some inexplicable reason.

“Also Kaka-sensei…” Naruto carefully placing a seal directly onto the light-bulb of the ceiling light trails off for a second unsure how to phrase it.

Sasuke, holding the lamp cover, catches on and continues for the blond. “Sakura fought a bear. On her own. How the hell were we suppose to help her? We didn’t even know till she got back.”

Screwing the cover on Naruto nods. “Yeah! Like she shoulda come ‘n got us, sure! But we were only supposed to scout! She’s the one that changed the plan!”

(The rumbling of Naruto’s chakra for the seal activation made two of the Sand siblings dart into the shadowy corners of their room, four floors away.)

And all of a sudden Kakashi has two angry boys glowering up at him offended at the assumption they hadn’t backed up the boss. How dare Kakashi talk shit. He left them barely a week into training! If anyone should be getting shit on it was him!

“Good work looking underneath, that was a test! You pass! Always support your teammates! Here’s Pakkun!”

Panicking midway through the speech because he was positive he’d used the cover ‘it was a test’ too many times recently Kakashi summed the entire pack.

The room an easy fit for three genin and a jounin sensei was suddenly over crowded and stuffy. Eight panting dogs and two smelly boys was a lot and the seals subtly kicked up a notch to help out.

As if the summon had pulled Sakura along with it the girl suddenly flung the bathroom door open, letting out a cloud of steam. Making everyone except the dogs’ jump. She was wrapped head to toe in about five different towels and was still vaguely disgusting though it was noticeably less then before.

“Pakkun! I KILLED A BEAR!” It was an ear rattling shriek that made the boys (Kakashi included) flinch.

Pakkun trotted right up to the girl and wagged his little pug tail (it was curly so it was better then a regular dog tail) and asked, “Did you eat it? I hear bear tastes funky.”

Sakura blinked down at the dog for a second then burst into tears.

Pakkun, unconcerned, trotted past her and into the bathroom saying over his shoulder “I want a bath, close the door you’re letting the heat out.”

The girl did so, then had to reopen it quickly when most of the pack leapt at surprise bath time.
Kakashi thankful he didn’t have to deal with the tears eyed the other would-be tear ducts warily. Spotting none he nodded then vanished before he could be roped into anything else.

Kakashi had plans to return later to make sure the kids ate but otherwise he was going to stay out of reach incase on decided to do something horrible. Like hug him.

In the room the remaining dogs clustered around the boys who were busy looking around to see if Kakashi was lurking in a shadow or something. Naruto even took the air vent apart. Nada.

Sasuke hadn’t even noticed the air vent and demanded, sharingan flashing, how Naruto found it. The boy sent him a cheeky grin and refused to tell.

When Sakura emerged from the bath a while later with five clean dogs in tow it was to a messy room and two dirty beds. She frowned at the boys without saying anything a purposely made her way to the one remaining clean bed by the door.

Which was the worst spot and the one most likely to be attacked but she had just killed a bear and Pakkun said that made her pretty damn cool. So she would probably be ok. (It would also be another three days before any other squad made it to the tower so lack of enemies meant lack of attacks. Sure Team 8 had been one of the first to get their scroll but they still had to get to the tower in the first place.)

Neither boy asked why Sakura’s uniform was drip drying in the bathroom or where she’d gotten her change of clothes from. When she produced sweats for the boys they only thanked her and mentally sent their thanks to Tenten for the scrolls and whatever self help guide told Sakura to always keep spares for teammates. Because they hadn’t thought that far ahead.

Sakura, tired but clean, asked the boys as she handed out the extra clothes if they were going to bathe and Naruto booked it into the room finally able to get rid of the mud clumping his hair. Sasuke sighed and flopped onto the third bed farthest from the door (and Sakura) practicing turning his sharingan on and off.

Later when the boys swapped, Naruto wrinkled his nose at Sasuke’s empty bed and went the the middle one. Bull, who commandeered it, let his tongue loll out onto a pillow when Naruto tried to shove him off. The boys ended up sharing while the dogs slept either on the middle twin bed or at the foot of Sakura’s.

A few days later, still a few days before the second stage was going to end, Naruto wandered into the cafeteria. He’d drawn the short straw and been sent for food. Well technically it was only between Naruto and Sasuke as Sakura had decided that she wasn’t in the mood for providing food for anyone. (She’d asked if they wanted roasted bear flanks since that was at the end of her sealing scroll. Everyone had politely declined.)

There was two other people in the large room. That creepy redheaded dude, that had been there from the beginning, who ignored everyone even better then Sasuke when he was in a snit, and some gray haired dude.

Naruto didn’t notice the guy spill his drink. He did notice when the guy suddenly appeared at his shoulder and tapped it.

Naruto squinted, suspicious as all get out. “Who’re you?”

The man (teenager?) smiled and said “I’m Kabuto. I don’t recognize you from the beginning of the exam…?”
It was a leading question and everyone knew it; Naruto, this Kabuto motherfucker, and creepy red in the corner.

Naruto sniffed and pointedly turned his nose away mimicking Sasuke at his prissiest. “My sensei wanted us to be in-con-spic-u-ous. We were in the back.” One eye opened up to see if the dude bought it.

Kabuto was smiling pleasantly and nodding. “That would explain it! Sometimes jounin senseis are very overprotective, they don’t really like letting their kids out on their own. Yours must be worried about you!”

Naruto wrinkled his nose at that. Kakashi never seemed worried about anything except for when Sakura did something ‘hazardous to the universe so cut that freaky shit out.’

When Naruto didn’t answer, lost in thought about his team, Kabuto coughed gently to redirect.

“How long has your team been at the tower? Mine only got in a few hours ago. The Forest is awful! I can’t believe they used it this year!”

Naruto turned his guileless eyes to the older boy, this year? As opposed to what? Last year?

“…You did the chunnin exams already?”

Naruto wasn’t impressed. Sure the Forest was scary and he never wanted to set foot in it again but so far this whole exam thing had been a cake walk.

“Well… yeah. Haha I know I shouldn’t let people know but I’ve taken the exams four times already. I’m an old hat at this stuff. So if you have any questions… well feel free to ask.”

The guy was still smiling super nice and all but Naruto was back to squinting at him. Four times? Wild. Naruto took the academy exam about six times before passing and he definitely wouldn’t say that made him an expert on it, since he clearly didn’t pass.

The silence stretched and Kabuto’s smile stretched with it. When Naruto didn’t respond Kabuto searched for something else to say.

“Oh! Aren’t you on Uchiha Sasuke’s team? Did he take the exams with you?”

Naruto wanted to snarl at the guy ‘how dare you remember the bastard and not me – I’m great!’ when his critical thinking skills snapped into place. How would this gray haired creep know he was on Sasuke’s team if he didn’t even recognize Naruto in the first place? Where did this freak get off asking about Naruto’s teammate?!

Mistaking Naruto’s scowl for an inherent dislike of Sasuke (which all current intel said was true) Kabuto smiled with some teeth this time trying to make a connection and pull a verbal reaction.

“Word on the street is Uchiha is rookie of the year and gonna make a lot of noise in the finals. Wanted to meet him for myself before, you know? Have a story to tell later.”

Naruto nodded slowly as if he understood what Kabuto was getting at. “You wanna meet the basta-uh, Sasuke?”

Kabuto nodded a sparkle in his eye of admiration or something. “Of course! I’ve heard amazing things about him! Its gotta be true!”
Oh. *That* kind of something.

Naruto took a single step back and said “Sorry never heard of him bye!”

Then turned around and ran out of the caf, up six flights of stairs, and through the door to Team 7’s dorm. Sakura almost stabbed him, which was good! She would stab creepy gray haired dudes if they tried coming in here.

Naruto ducked around to the other side of the room and grabbed an alarmed Sasuke by the shoulders and gave him more eye contact then either was comfortable with. But this was important so he was gonna do it.

“Stranger danger Sasuke! Stranger. Danger. We gotta stay here and eat nothing but bear there’s weirdoes here that wanna meet you. Like the girls in the academy, but old! Stranger danger!”

The team had to be coaxed out of their room by an irritated Kakashi for the prelims. Eventually Pakkun offered to let each of the kids touch his toe beans for luck if they moved their asses and skedaddled.

“Come on kids. Don’t you know? Touching a dog paw is good luck. Especially mine. Because its me.”

It was reluctant but the team came out of the room and touched pink pads before headed down to line up with the rest of the candidates.

That creepy guy (the one with the hair) (not the red one the other one) dropped out of the race and Naruto hissed at Sasuke with an obvious headtilt.

Sakura marked the guy in her mental log as someone to look into later if she had time.

The preliminaries were largely entertaining. Fights among genin were mostly flash and little substance but the villages were trying their best to put on a show.

Sasuke went first. It was… an event and one that nearly got Sasuke eliminated from the competition entirely.

About mid way through his fight with the older Konoha nin Sasuke’s second sharingan activated leaving the Uchiha green and liable to puke. The gut punch a second earlier also had something to do with it.

Sasuke climbed across the ceiling for a second shaking his head like a dog with water in its ear before his eyes adjusted.

When Akado Yoro appeared in front of him ready to go in for the kill Sasuke thought of the only real move he’d seen with the sharingan. (He hadn’t but he thought about it so much in the last week it was the same thing really.) With academy textbook perfect form Sasuke hauled off and decked the older and taller boy in the throat.

A perfect mimic of Sakura would have gotten the face and broken Akado’s glasses (Sasuke didn’t have the force to break a face yet but a nose was possible). As it was it only bruised his trachea and caused some minor swelling. In the moment that was enough to stop Akado in his tracks and drop him from the ceiling so that he landed awkwardly, rolled an ankle, and gasping he made a call for a medic.
Gekko Hayate called the match while Sasuke was still on the ceiling blinking at his own fist in wonder.

The much anticipated, and very expensive, match of the Yamanaka heiress and Haruno Sakura made the room shift with speculation. None of the genin in the room took notice of the extra chunnin in the shadows nor the frowns of their jounin sensei.

Sakura was turning out to be a wild card and none of the info that had been hustled earlier seemed to match up to the image they got.

Instead of a green genin in a bright red dress they got a tiny soldier that wouldn’t have looked out of place in the trenches.

Sakura didn’t have a spare uniform and Kakashi forbade the team from wearing their typical style until the forest portion of the exams were complete. So Sakura was still dressed like a miniature jounin complete with a tiny breast plate, different from the pocketed vests now favored in peace time.

Standing across from her was Ino who looked slightly worn from the forest but artfully so. As if it was all intentional and that she had to look beautiful at all times.

Which wasn’t fair because sure Ino could pull that off but noooo Sakura wasn’t allowed to.

While Sakura was huffy about not looking pretty Ino was horrified to realize that not only was her rival in the exams but she had gotten a makeover at some point and hadn’t told Ino about it. (Ino knew Sakura was in the exams – she’d just watched Sasuke kick ass – but standing across the rink from the pink girl was a whole other level of realization.)

Frowning at the outfit Ino was shocked to realize that Sakura looked professional. Like the older shinobi sometimes did. The uniform was kinda grimy and looked like it smelled but the intent was there. Somehow Sakura had gown up.

Hayate said go and neither girl moved beyond Ino pointing dramatically at Sakura.

“Sakura! What! What happened to you?! Why are you dressed like that?!”

“…A dog.” Sakura shrugged, she wasn’t sure how to explain and didn’t want to in front of all these strangers. Plus, she wasn’t allowed to tell about the whole sneaking into the exams thing.

Scoffing Ino crossed her arms. “Whatever no makeover is gonna stop me from kicking your ass!”

Sakura grinned.

“Bring it.”

Tenten casually slid into an empty spot next to Naruto. Catching the blond’s eye, she grinned with all her teeth. This match was a gift from the bookie gods. Naruto winked back before loudly yelling for Sakura to win.

The money they’d make off this match alone would get Team 7 off their ridiculous mission load for two weeks minimum and would keep Team Gai away for at least that long. Naruto didn’t like running books but he could sell a corpse life insurance and was very good at keeping tabs on all the other sharks.
Meeting Tenten, who was great at everything, was honestly all they needed to breakout on their own.

Sasuke scoffed out of the corner of his mouth at Naruto who kindly didn’t mention he’d seen the Uchiha slip some bills to Tenten earlier.

The entirety of the Konoha rookies went stock still at the thud of a body meeting a fist and all the air being knocked out of someone. Any distractions are left on the wayside as they refocus on the match currently happening.

Neji grimaces and wondered if the punch broke ribs (it didn’t but it sure did hurt anyways).

In the arena Ino and Sakura are in the midst of a solid taijutsu bout. Sakura is clearly the weaker of the two in terms of stance functionality but her hits are harder and leave more damage despite it.

Ultimately in an academy spar both girls would be equally matched and had one of them not spent the last few months running around fighting clan boys the fight very easily could have gone either way or ended in a draw.

As it was, Ino was taking hits harder then she could stand and Sakura seemed entirely unfazed by the return blows.

Its Ino that pulls a blade first, she hadn’t noticed the tanto strapped to Sakura’s back until after the match began but Ino was unwilling to be on the other side of it. The kunai comes easily into her hand and instead of a sweeping punch Ino slices at Sakura catching her slightly off guard and leaving a neat wound against Sakura’s forearm.

Both girls hop back to gather their bearings. Ino is breathing hard and nervous. Sakura was dressing differently and moving differently and acting differently then she remembered.

Growing up and becoming a badass kunoichi and leaving her rival behind. Ino wasn’t about to stand for it and throws her kunai hard at the other girl, following closely behind it with a new knife.

Sakura knocks the blade away and neatly slips around Ino’s attacks. Pulling her own kunai in the moment. Their blades hit hard enough to create sparks. The awful metal on metal screeching revealed the difference in weapon quality.

Sakura tended to pick up every spare kunai she stumbled across, a habit built on years of having to beg her parents to buy academy supplies – civilians tended to be very annoyed over the number of lost academy items and refused to resupply often believing that their children should take better care of their weapons, years of this had taught the instructors that it was impossible to convince these parents that the most important weapon the children had to maintain was themselves. Ino’s supply came from the favored Yamanaka smithy.

The girls finding themselves at a stalemate hop back yet again to figure something else out.

Up on the balcony the rest of the candidates are getting a little bored. This match wasn’t nearly as exciting as the first few and neither girl seemed willing to pull out any interesting tricks.

Tenten and Naruto are doing some quick mental math over the books. Neji is refusing to offer any support and isn’t watching the match out of protest. Sasuke wondered where the fist of doom went and why Ino wasn’t out cold yet. And Lee, the loudest of the bunch, is yelling at the rink about Sakura being his eternal rival forever.

Ino hears an unfamiliar boy cheering Sakura on. That same boy – she thinks he’s teammates with the
Hyuuga prodigy – calls Sakura his rival. His eternal rival. Sakura.

*Sakura was Ino’s rival.* She’d said so herself when they graduated. Who did Sakura think she was, suddenly to good to be Ino’s rival that she had to go find some boy?

Hissing with fury Ino points at Sakura with her kunai.

“You’re my rival! And I wont let you forget it! Even if you go out and start looking like a badass kunoichi! Well if you can do it so can I!”

Sakura, uncertain about the change in attitude, lets Ino talk. She didn’t really have a plan and needed a second to come up with one. Sakura was in an exam to show her qualifications as a ninja, not a street kid. She couldn’t just throw it all to the wind and drag Ino to the ground and pound her face in.

Right?

… Actually Sakura wants to win. She didn’t care how she did it or how she looked she wants to win!

“Are you sure about that Pig? Its not like you can do anything to fix that,” Sakura dramatically drags her eyes over Ino’s outfit, “right now. Guess you’re gonna have to live with me beating you.”

Ino, furious at herself for falling behind and at Sakura for forgetting her, gives a wordless screech and reaches back to grab her long ponytail. It takes a second of sawing but she chops the whole thing off in a moment.

Brandishing the hair at Sakura triumphantly Ino yells across to the other girl “See Sakura! Anything you do so can I! And even better then you! Ha!”

She throws the hair down scattering it across the ring just as Sakura lunges forward pulling the tanto out as she goes.

The girls exchange blows again, Ino dancing around in a circle leading Sakura on a merry chase.

Sakura slices and stabs with the specialized knife, clearly unpracticed and undisciplined. It gives Ino all the openings she needs to put Sakura directly where she wants her. It also gives Sakura the opening she needs to land a killing blow.

That’s all she has available and she sees what’s happening as its happening. The blade is coming down and Ino’s eyes are wide and calculating. There’s an opening in her guard and Sakura has slipped right through it.

She is so unpracticed with the weapon Sakura doesn’t know how to turn the hit into something out of a regulation spar. How to make the strike a tap.

And in that flash of realization Sakura sees Ino, her oldest and best friend in the world, and then sees the wide dead eyes of Kyo.

Sakura jerks her hand back up, before the blow can land, so hard she stumbles backwards. She infused her grip with chakra, forcing the motions to halt and reverse with an iron will and iron grip.

Hayate shifts back, having been moments away from calling the match. Its clearly going to continue, he thought he was going to have to intervene quickly to save the life of a clan heir.

Ino smirks at Sakura, unaware of how close she had been to death, the pink girl had fallen right into
Putting distance between the two Ino activates her chakra gluing Sakura to the ground through the natural conduit of her hair. There is a moment of silence as Sakura’s eyes widen and she realizes what happened.

Then Sakura’s faces twists into a nasty scowl at the trick. She knows what’s coming next, that Ino will invade her mind and make Sakura surrender.

The tanto is useless in her hand so far from the other girl and there is no way Sakura is going to be able to dodge the attack. Her only option is to fight back mentally. If its even possible.

“So this is it Ino? Can’t beat me in a fight so you cheat? Thought you wanted to be better then me?”

Vicious words for a girl that can’t even move.

Ino ignores the taunts and takes a deep breath as she raised her hands. Best not to respond.

Sakura’s hand had been diving into her pouch for a kunai when she was trapped. She’d left it in place. Unable to move her feet or legs didn’t giver her a lot of opportunity and flinging a blade at Ino would only delay the attack not stop it.

Her eyes dart around in panic. There’s not much time left as Ino situates herself. Sakura looks up at her teammates. They’ve clustered around Team Gai. Everyone is watching her lose, everyone was going to see her fail. She’d done nothing but try and try and give her all to her team and the village and now she was going to be a disappointment.

Sakura’s gaze slips from her team down to the underside of the balcony. She blinks with inspiration. Oh. Oh that was a good idea. Her hand was in the correct holster and everything.

Eyes slanting at Ino Sakura shifts as much as she is able and hurls her tanto through the air at the other girl. Ino squawks but doesn’t dodge, the blade falling short of the target. Distracted as she is, Ino doesn’t see Sakura pull a fist full of tags from her pouch and only looks up at the whistling of an approaching kunai.

Hastily smacking it aside Ino turns to mock the trapped girl only to blink at all the paper in the air for a second, eyes rounding in horror.

Sakura had one hand pulled up into a sign, mouth stretched into a grin.

The paper activates simultaneously and while Ino can’t hear it she reads, clear as day, off Sakura’s lips.

“I win, rival.”

On the balconies the audience shifts between boredom and mild passing interest. The fight wasn’t very exciting, no special moves and nothing worthwhile to report home about. Maybe the jounin could go home and say that picture was probably a one off for the pink girl but otherwise that was it.

The kids that had seen some shit go down in the weeks previous are nervous. Naruto knows that Sakura and Ino have some sort of crazy history that makes them lose their minds around each other and Sakura isn’t fighting right.
She’d taken to brawling recently and liked to drag people to the ground to give ‘em a ‘ol what’s for. Here it was like she was under the scrutiny of Iruka-sensei at the academy. Textbook kata’s and absolutely no deviations of form. That wasn’t really Sakura’s strength. She threw a mean punch and beat the shit out of Neji a couple of times so the fact Ino wasn’t going down after a couple of hits meant something was up.

Sakura had even beat Sasuke up so bad that’s why they were even here in the first place! Naruto honestly thought the match was going to last about five minutes but its been closer to twenty. The girls going in, hitting each other, then backing off to breathe for a bit.

Lee hadn’t stopped cheering once.

And then Ino chopped all her hair off and Sakura was stuck. Oh boy. Sakura seemed to look up at them and Naruto, trying to be supportive flashed a thumbs up. So did Tenten. He wasn’t sure if she saw it or not but Sakura did get a funny look in her eye.

It was mean and nasty and Naruto wondered if Neji would recognize it if he saw.

When Sakura threw that awesome sword thing at Ino, Naruto started cheering again. Faintly he could hear Kaka-sensei sigh somewhere to his left. Probably didn’t like Sakura throwing around family heirlooms or whatever it was.

“Ino’s gonna die.” Grinning Naruto stepped back away from the rail pretty sure he knew what was coming next.

“Rest in peace,” intoned Sasuke, who had been back from the rail firm in his decision that distance was the better part of valor even if he couldn’t see the whole fight. Sasuke was honestly surprised it took so long for this to happen.

Kakashi rolled his eyes at their dramatics. Pakkun – who wasn’t suppose to be here – was grinning his doggy grin and peered upwards at Kakashi.

“You have to get her a dog for this.”

Uhm?! No?! Kakashi was not going to do any such thing! And Pakkun couldn’t make him. That was final.

The skeptical side eye Kakashi got from the dog and his team made him want to sweat and quit on the spot so he ignored them and focused on other things. Like Gai’s students who behaved better then his did (that was a lie).

Actually Kakashi was going to keep ignoring Gai’s student who’d leapt backwards at the start of the fight and was pretending not to be cowering as far from the rail as possible.

Lee, absolutely delighted by the entire fight (and very entertaining to watch), flung his arms up in a double fist pump as the arena exploded. Gai had to grab his collar and yank him back behind the perimeter seals before they activated.

Tenten, ever prepared, had sunglasses on.

The explosion was massive, the rush of fire and heat scorching so hot and fast activated the seals designed to protect the spectators and keep the fight contained. Typically, only a few seals had to activate at a time as attacks tended to be directional.

Every single one flared up creating a soft blue barrier that nothing could shift through. Including a
horrified jounin sensei rushing to save his student.

Asuma smacked into the barrier hard enough to rattle his own brains before sliding to the ground. He sprung back up ready to dash into the flames as soon as the wards decided it was safe enough to drop.

Luckily for Ino, Hayate was already inside the barrier when it activated and at this point was an old hand at not being blown up by paper bombs.

He’d swept the girl up and managed to redirect most of the blast so it flowed around them instead of through. They both came out of it remarkably crispy and Ino’s arms – which she had thrown up to protect her face – had to be treated for second degree burns.

It would hurt like hell but it wasn’t a big deal for the medics on standby.

Sakura just outside of the epicenter of the blast had fluctuated her chakra – just like Kaka-sensei had shown her a week ago – to match the wavelength of the seal’s activation. Instead of becoming fuel Sakura registered as part of the fire and suffered no burns or injury from the blast.

R&D teams would hear about this later and come snooping around to snatch up this random kid with insane chakra control because the number of people who could activate nearly thirty seals and survive the direct blast was slim at best.

Kakashi sighed again when he realized that he was going to have to explain why his student had on hand numerous modified explosion tags. And how she lived using them. Ah, fuck. And she was his apprentice now. Double fuck he was going to have to explain in triplicate how Sakura had even gotten ahold of this many tags in the first place.

He suspected Naruto but also knew for a fact that stash had gotten used up in training.

The smoke cleared slowly and the barrier seals dropped. Hayate was standing off to the side of the rink, Ino tucked under one arm.

“Uh… Winner Haruno Sakura.”

Naruto’s fight… sure was something. And gross. Sakura was glad he won but also at what cost? The dignity of the entire team probably.

Either way she congratulated him on the win and tried to redirect everyone’s attention back to the board for the next match.

Hyuuga Hinata vs Hyuuga Neji.

Sakura gasped quietly, suddenly realizing she hadn’t made time to show Hinata how to defeat or at least seriously maim Neji.

Whipping her head around her eyes met the white gaze of Neji and Sakura sent him a vicious glare and shook her fist at him before running off to find the heiress.

She met up with Hinata at the stairs. The Hyuuga princess was dragging her feet trying with all her might to postpone the inevitable.

“Hinata! Hinaaa- ah. Right ok.” Both girls stood quietly for a second before Sakura lunged forwards
to grab Hinata’s shoulders in a crushing grip.

Making direct eye contact, then having to duck to maintain it when Hinata looked down, Sakura gave Hinata some fast and dirty wisdom.

“You gotta go for his hair. Wait- no I cut it off. Break his hand. That’ll work. Or poke an eyeball out. His! His eyeball not yours! Well that might work too but, uh, don’t do that.”

Hinata was nodding along with the advice, planning on not using an ounce of it.

Somehow sensing this Sakura gave the other girl a light shake.

“No, no seriously Hinata you gotta fight him completely different then he’s expecting. If you go in all ‘clan taught’ he’s gonna win cause he’s a prick. But if you, uh… shake things up a little and fight dirty you can win!”

There was probably some wisdom in that but Hinata wasn’t completely sold.

“Didn’t… didn’t you just use… academy katras against I-Ino-san?”

Which was a fair point.

“Ahhhh yeah but! I had my reasons!” Shitty terrible reasons but still.

“If I lose will you… will you still train with me Sakura-chan?”

“Of course!” Sakura’s eyes darted around looking for eavesdroppers. She leaned in close whispering, “You gotta be really mean and insult him. It works every time.”

Hinata nodded and Sakura let her go.

As she walked down the stairs she could hear Sakura whisper shouting “Fight on!” behind her.

This was going to be brutal and Hinata was worried she didn’t have it in her to be brutal back.

But Sakura told her to be mean and Sakura had sent Neji-niisan to the hospital a couple of times. Plus, she almost took out the entire building with that blast.

Hinata was the exact opposite of blind and knew how much money had traded hands at the end of that fight on her side of the balcony alone. She needed to remember to tell Tenten-san that the man with the gray hair had cheated her out of a couple hundred yen with a switch.

Plus, Hinata knew how much money had been spent for this particular match to happen in the first place. Three times the weight the Yamanaka’s paid. Zero interference for a killing blow. She needed to be prepared and guarded, Hayate-san was not going to be coming to her rescue.

(Ohhh yes he was. Hayate sure as fuck wasn’t about to let some poor kid die if he could stop it. He didn’t give a lick about the money they could take it out of his pay, fucking bourgeoisie.)

Alrighty here she goes. She’s gonna do it! Insult Neji-niisan! Be mean! Sakura said she could do it!

“Start!”

Hinata, in a very un-ninja fashion, squeezed her eyes shut – she could see through her eyelids but the point stands – and clenched her fists.
“Neji-niisan your hair looks terrible! Like – like a, a patchy lemur!”

Eyes still shut Hinata could see – through her lids! – Neji-niisan’s face go through a complicated string of emotions. Shock, rage, fury, embarrassment, horror, rage, panic, rage.

Rage seemed to be winning. Whipping his head up Neji pointed directly at Sakura and made a vaguely threatening gesture, unwilling to raise his voice at the demon girl.

While he was distracted with Sakura making a series of rude gestures back, Hinata sucked in a deep breath, opened her eyes, squared her shoulders, and ran straight at her cousin. Steps quieter then any mouse-summon she managed to get right on top of the boy before he noticed.

Her shoulder slammed into Neji-niisan’s gut with enough force to make the boy gag.

She wished in that moment that she had practiced enough to shoot chakra through all of her tenketsu, not just her hands and feet. The practice with chakra climbing set by Kurenai-sensei was helping but even that had been difficult to master.

Hinata’s shoulder tackle knocked both Hyuuga to the floor and momentarily stunned them with her daring.

Hyuuga didn’t fight like street rats, they were a noble shinobi clan. Which was a bit of a misnomer since shinobi sold their skills to anyone with enough coin, but the Hyuuga had their standards and the talentless heir had broken generations of tradition with that move.

The two wrestled in shock on the ground for a second before Neji remembered that he was a Hyuuga and had a grudge to burn out. He struck with perfect precision into Hinata’s shoulder sending the girl flying off.

She rolled a couple of feet a way and shakily climbed to her feet. Gritting her teeth, she lunged again at her cousin.

Neji, slightly more prepared, slipped sideways to avoid the lunge and struck out intending to remove the use of Hinata’s left arm.

Instead Hinata wrapped herself around Neji’s arm, like a koala and brought all her weight to bare, dropping Neji to his knees off balance. She used the momentum to slam her forehead into Neji’s face breaking his nose.

The shift of weight and force and physics and carelessness snapped Neji’s arm like a twig. He screamed and Hinata screamed and Sakura was yelling in the background and Neji’s entire world focused in on wanting to utterly destroy Haruno Sakura.

Which he couldn’t do if he lost to his worthless cousin. (She’d just broken his arm in a non regulation move – who was useless now?!)

Yelling he swung his non-broken, un-grabbed arm up and caught Hinata in the temple with a chakra laden fist. It laid the girl out flat and Hayate called the fight. It hadn’t even been 5 minutes.

Both Hyuuga were carted off the arena in stretchers.

Hinata opened on eye as she passed under the balcony and saw Sakura cheering her on and celebrating her near victory. Hinata had made a friend! One that would cheer and help and give advice! Maybe she could convince Sakura to sleepover after some of their training sessions?
Hinata eyes slipped shut – and she didn’t try and focus on anything in particular so it was almost like her eyes had closed for real – and she smiled the whole way to the clinic.

Neji hissing and spitting like a cat was nothing but background noise to her dreams.

Chapter End Notes

GUYYYYSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS THANK YOU FOR ALL THE LOVE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

ok so a message from the sponsor: i might be slow to update for a while got some real life nonsense to deal with but i wanted to get this out here so TADAAAA also i really love an appreciate every comment it does help with the whole... writing energy thing! and SOME OF YOU FOUND ME ON TUMBLR!!!!!!! COME TALK TO ME ABOUT LIFE THE UNIVERSE EVERYTHING i always have time to go meta about something i write 100000% and even things i dont write for but am in the fandom for ill happily chat about!

theforceisstronginthegirl

guys I'm so nervous about these fight scenes i about drove my roomie up the wall whining about them. omg i agonized for dayssssssss over it lilllllll

now something i haven't done a poll! if you could get a dog what kind of dog would you get?
lol yes this is related to Sakura and pakkuns new quest to get her a dog but i do already have an idea of if that will or wont happen and if it does what kind of dog ill be. I just love hearing about peoples dream dogs. OR if you have a dog what kind is it?? I have a 35lb black mutt that i love named Dinah after the black canary.

No beta we die like men now

EDIT: Sakura's fight was suppose to be... crappy. a bit of a let down to the audience hoping for some crazy reenactment of the Bear or something. not... that

I ALSO HAVE A NEW FIC "The Origin of One H. Sakura"
Kakashi was about two steps removed from being truly pissed off and the only person he could really blame for it was himself.

He was standing in the middle of Sakura’s pink room with its pink furniture covered in dogs and no Sakura to be seen.

The pack as a whole greeted him with happy tail wags and soft woofs but there wasn’t a spick of human words spoken.

Apparently the pack was on strike.

First of all, Kakashi had no clue that the dogs had any concept of work related collective bargaining nor that they would actually put them into practice.

Second it was complete and utter bullshit and Kakashi was tired but so far negotiations had failed and flat out ordering the dogs to behave and earned him a warning for a breach of contract. That had made the fine hairs on the back of Kakashi’s neck stand on end and made him start paying attention.

As far as he could tell, with the dogs refusing to speak and all, they were furious about something to do with Sakura.

After the preliminaries and her explosive qualifying match Kakashi had given the girl the week off to rest and recuperate from her time in the forest and dealing with the boys. He thought that the girl would appreciate it.

Besides Kakashi was busy! In the past week he’d started drilling Sasuke slowly working up the eye reveal which… had been a disaster. And he’d gotten Naruto passed successfully onto Jiraiya which took a metric ton of effort, thank you very much.

He wasn’t sure what that boy was eating but it sure did leave him with a weirdly specific hyper fixation on minute details slightly suspicious (and white haired men, Kakashi found this slightly offensive). Which was basically all you got when facing the Sannin for the first time.

So now Kakashi was letting one kid burn off steam (literally, that poor lake), had foisted one off to some other unsuspecting dumbass, and was missing another. And, worst of all, the pack was mad at him.

He sighed at the dogs who sighed back in sync. It was probably as tiring for them to be mad as it was to be on the other side of it.

“Ok ok. I’ll fix it. I just, ugh. I need to know where she is and the false trails aren’t helping guys.”

Pakkun tilted a suspicious yet beautiful pug eye at Kakashi for a second.

“Keep talking.” He wasn’t about to give up the girl so easy, even if his boy was making it hard with that pitiful face.

“…I got her a pair of charka conducting gloves… and an ink kit.” Kakashi didn’t want to admit it to
the dogs incase the girl was like hiding under her bed or something (there was space in her closet right under the air vent for a grown jounin to fit and noo Kakashi totally didn’t know about it at all), but Kakashi was about three hours into this search and should have *been able to find a genin by now*. Obviously there was foul play at work.

Pakkun rolled his eyes at the human, huffily turning around to go back to his cozy spot on the bed in a nice little sunbeam.

“Ya gotta do a little more then give her stuff boss. Ya gotta, like, teach her things.” Shiba came in for the rescue and decided that the boss was being very stupid and needed a little help.

Kakashi frowned at the dogs. He *had* taught her things. That’s why she was even in the third part of the exam.

“All things.” Clarified Shiba.

That didn’t sound right but Kakashi didn’t know enough about girls to argue. Instead he kept silent hoping that would somehow convince the dogs to hand over the location.

“Boss… kids get killed in this part and... they all saw what she can do in the prelims…” Shiba was a very good dog and didn’t want to hear any crap from the pack for breaking silence. In fact, he was the best dog which was why he had to tell his idiot boss which way was up.

Oh. *Oh*. That’s what this was about? Alrighty then Kakashi could handle this.

Snapping his fingers then pointing at the dogs he cheerfully said “Exactly. She need to work on her use of the tanto and needs help perfecting her seals. Hence the ink. And the gloves.”

He smiled with his eyes and waited.

Pakkun barked out a laugh.

“Do you think we are fucking stupid asshole? We know you plan on spending a few hours with her before running back to that Uchiha brat. Sakura is your apprentice, if she does bad that gonna hurt you more then the Uchiha would.”

Foiled.

Alright time to pull out the big guns.

“And. And. I’ll step up her taijutsu training.”

The flat look he got from the dogs said succinctly ‘that’s it?’ so Kakashi shrugged helplessly at them.

“I can’t randomly pick a jutsu to teach her when I don’t know her element or how she even wants to fight guys. Give me a little slack here.”

The flat look continued.

“Alright alright. I’ll outsource a little. Sasuke could use some variety and so can Sakura. They still might have to fight one another I can’t combine their training right now.” He held up his hands in surrender. The chance was extremely slim that the kids would fight each other – any combination therein – but it was best to be prepared for a just incase.

The dogs gathered, precariously, on Sakura’s bed to discuss in their doggy language. Kakashi pretending to give them some privacy turned around – it wasn’t like he couldn’t understand them and
the pack knew that. But this was a dog only matter and as close as Kakashi came to being a dog he still hadn’t managed to lose his pesky species yet.

Pakkun thought for a bit before he hopped off the bed – dislodging half the pack as he did – and trotted over to Kakashi.

“I’ll take you to Sakura. But!” Here he paused to give Kakashi a stink eye. “Only if I get to oversee your training of her.”

Kakashi opened his mouth to agree quickly when Pakkun hurriedly interrupted with a “And the other kids too.”

Kakashi clicked his mouth shut annoyed. First of all, Naruto wasn’t even his to train right now and second, Kakashi was the only one capable of training Sasuke correctly.

The two glowered at one another for a long minute before Kakashi – running through multiple scenarios – relented.

“Fine. Do what you want.”

Pakkun grinned and wagged his curly pug tail and hoped out the window. *Just you wait,* thought Pakkun smugly, *you brought this on yourself.*

Sakura, unpredictably thought Kakashi who still wasn’t entirely clear on what the kids got up to regularly, was buried in the back of the records room eating a stick of string cheese like some sort of heathen. She was taking bites out of it instead of peeling it like you were supposed to.

Kakashi frowned at the cheese morally offended.

Reading a file four inches thick Sakura didn’t even glance up at the jounin though she did giggle at Pakkun snuffling at her ear when he hopped up to lean his front paws against her arm.

“Yo.”

No response.

So Kakashi waited for the girl to reach a stopping point. It was rude to interrupt someone reading, also he figured she’d cut it out pretty fast.

Sakura didn’t.

Kakashi, who decided he didn’t have anything better to do then wait out a brat after all, plopped down next to the girl on the floor and set about not saying anything until she spoke first.

The battle of wills kept up for a solid hour, Pakkun taking a nap in the mean time, before one of the ninja who worked in the records room coughed to get their attention.

“Hatake-san… Anyone spending this much time in records… really must get a security pass…” The man shifted foot to foot embarrassed to be correcting the famed copy-nin.

“Don’t worry about it Namiko-senpai. I don’t think Kakashi-sensei is going to be here much longer.”
Sakura spoke calm and cool not even glancing up from the file. She wasn’t taking notes but she was reading intensely.

The man opened his mouth a few times to argue but Kakashi made sure to send him the most unsettling smile he could manage and it seemed to sweep all courage away from the ninja. Konoha should really take a second look at who they were promoting these days…

Finally, Sakura closed the file and gathered up her stack – it was huge – and hurried through putting it all away before the record nin, Namiko, could help.

“Bye Namiko-senpai, I’ll see you later! Those medic-nin files are super cool thank you!” Sakura called over her shoulder as she ran out the door.

If she didn’t want to make the most of Kakashi’s precious time who was he to argue? Content to follow the girl he blinked as he realized they were wandering away from the direction of the training fields and towards… Naruto’s apartment?

 “…Ah… Sakura…” Alright Kakashi would admit it, he wanted to know what was going on. He’d also caught sight of a woman dressed similarly to Kurenai and suddenly remembered that chat they had last week.

“Wait! Can’t talk yet!” Sakura sped up into a full run for the last block before stopping on the balcony of Naruto’s apartment.

Kakashi and Pakkun followed her into the apartment and watched faintly bemused – Kakashi was Pakkun had seen this happen a couple of times before – as Sakura franticly scribbled on a notepad.

While Sakura did that Kakashi casually observed the changes to the room. Instead of the western style bed in the corner there was a neat futon folded with its blankets stacked on top. In fact, Kakashi noted that all of the crummy cast off western furniture Naruto owned had been replaced with decent to high quality traditional items.

It looked like someone had even cleaned and polished the floor. Which was astounding because last Kakashi was here he thought the floor was concrete like many cheap lofts were. Not hardwood. The amount of dirt that had to be removed for this…

And the bookshelves. There was a desk shoved into a corner and the entire room was lined with floor to ceiling bookshelves and filing cabinets. Interested Kakashi reached out to open the nearest drawer.

The second his hand touched the metal knob it felt like his stomach was trying to vacate the premise through his feet, his heart was going to leap out of his chest, and he bit a hole through his tongue clenching his teeth so he wouldn’t shriek in pain.

He knew what electricity felt like, Kakashi literally held lightning in his hand on a regular basis, and this wasn’t it.

Kakashi couldn’t rip his hand off the knob to get away from the pain, his muscles weren’t working right. Holy shit it hurt like a motherfucker.

This was it, this was how he died.

Abruptly it cut off and Kakashi, famed copy-nin, friend-killer, the cold blooded ANBU captain Hound – felt his knees wobble before he sank to the ground in a heap clutching his chest trying to catch his breath.
Sakura was crouched next to him holding out a glass of water looking apologetic.

“Here sensei, it helps wash the after-effect away…”

Kakashi took the glass and ended up scrambling to the sink to spit out a mouthful of blood.

Sakura, eyes averted, handed Kakashi a new glass of salt water.

Eventually Kakashi swirled the salt water around for the wound and then drank the regular tap water to get rid of the lingering shocks in his molars.

Sitting in a new heap across the low table from Sakura he leveled his singular eyeball at the girl then promptly decided this deserved both eyeballs and pulled his headband up to glare with the demon eye as well.

Sakura flinched at the sight of the sharingan – not nearly as bad as Sasuke had the day earlier – and tried to drop her eyes to her hands. Kakashi wasn’t having it.

“Sakura what the fuck. You shouldn’t be able to get your hands on those types of security seals and I know for a fact you’re not advanced enough to make them. How did you get them and why.”

It was delivered so flat it couldn’t be mistaken as a question. Kakashi was pissed. And Sakura knew it. Pakkun, asleep under the table once he decided his boy would live, knew it too.

“Well…” Sakura hedged for a second before sucking in a deep breath for a monolog.

“Well ok, in the forest I killed that bear right? Well I kept all the meat and the skin after dressing it and getting the scroll. I dunno why but it seemed like the thing to do? So after we got back I took it to Uncle Ta- uhhh…. because he knows everyone and would know what to do with it. Anyways I sold the meat – chakra fed bear meat is expensive! And took the skin to a couple of shops looking for people Uncle sent me for when I found Hisakawa Danuja-sensei.”

Sakura paused a little nervous and lanced up at Kakashi. His hair was a little wilder then usual and his eyes (plural!) were very scary. There was no recognition of the name. Deep breaths girl you got this, Sakura thought at herself.

“She’s in the Uzushio district like me so it worked out great! Anyways she specializes in security and I asked her about keeping some files and stuff… safe and she gave me… scammed me… a bunch of seals for it! Took some work getting myself and the boys keyed in but you haven’t been around! Or that wouldn’t happen!”

Sakura paused a little nervous and lanced up at Kakashi. His hair was a little wilder then usual and his eyes (plural!) were very scary. There was no recognition of the name. Deep breaths girl you got this, Sakura thought at herself.

“That was really rude sensei! I have’ta fight too ya know! What am I supposed to do? Surrender? Die?”

“No Sakura.” Kakashi pinched the bridge of his nose suddenly exhausted. His fingernails felt like they might come loose – what the hell was in those seals?

“I thought that the forest was a bit rough on you and that you needed some time. I didn’t expect you to be in the records – which you need to explain next – or messing with seals so far beyond your rank they bypass half the village.”
Sakura glared at the man because that wasn’t an apology. And Sakura, rightfully, thought she deserved one.

All Kakashi could focus on was ‘thank god Jiraiya is in town so he can take a look at this shit before one of these dumbasses ends up dead and I get blamed.’

Before the two could go back to a battle of wills and silence Pakkun (who wasn’t really asleep but only pretending so the humans could work their nonsense out) chomped down on Kakashi’s toe. Flinching Kakashi tried to cover it with a cough. It didn’t really work.

“I… apologize. For not giving you the …training… you needed.” The words physically pained Kakashi to say but if it was the only way to stop the dog strike then so be it. He also wanted to know why Sakura was dealing with security seals.

“Its ok sensei. I forgive you! Besides if you hadn’t been such a jerk about it I never woulda figured this out!” And with a flourish Sakura produced three seals that made Kakashi gawk.

She slapped one to the table. Crawled over to the singular window and slapped one to the frame then trotted across the room to slap one to the door. Kakashi could feel the surge as the seals linked up with the previously placed security, the chakra net settling nicely across the room, making the apartment all but invisible to the outside and cleanly wiping it from inquiring peoples memories.

The ANBU stationed outside, previously following Sakura, scratched his head wondering how the hell the kid had lost him.

“Sakura. Explain now.”

“Ok! Ok! I just. Sensei this is Big! I think!”

Sakura settled back at the table before pulling up a different notepad from earlier. She slid it across to Kakashi. The scribbles made no sense to the jounin though the sharingan went ahead and neatly memorized it in its entirety. Maybe it was a code.

“That’s the complete file of Yakushi Kabuto. I… its in code but I can teach it to you… I don’t have a key written…” She paused nervously. Kakashi gestured for her to go on.

“So… in the tower Naruto met this guy that creeped him out. Like how the… uhm… some of the guys who go into the Akasen that all the street kids know to stay away from… anyways he pointed him out. And I was in the records room looking up some stuff about other genin who competed in the third exam stage to get some pointers… I’m allowed to look at genin files since I’m a captain you know…”

She glanced up to see if Kakashi was following along. He was and his eyes looked very sharp at the mention of this Kabuto guy. That was good, it meant he believed her.

“I was grabbing Yakushi Kameko’s file and grabbed his also on accident. And then the records nin, Namiko-senpai asked me about it specifically. And I thought that was really weird so I said I was interested in… medic nin since his file had a green tab on it. So they let me take it too.”

Kakashi was frowning down at the scribbles so Sakura grabbed a blank paper and started writing the key as she spoke.

“I read Kameko’s file which was super normal and she died in the third stage like eight years ago. But Kabuto’s file didn’t make sense. Kaka-sensei… He’s taken the chunnin exams five times but he’s been recommended for field promotion three times for medic work. And he turned it down each
time saying he wasn’t ready for the reasonability.”

Sakura flipped to the backside of the paper to continue the key.

“When he’s not on missions Kabuto runs half the trauma ward at Konoha General.”

*That* made Kakashi sit up and listen to what Sakura was saying. That wasn’t right. Kakashi didn’t know a lot about medic-nin’s or how the hospital was run but years ago Rin had worked there part time and he had listened to her complain about it enough to have a general idea.

A genin, no matter how talented, should *not* have clearance to run one of the most important wards in a shinobi hospital.

The kid grabbed another sheet and continued to write.

“And that’s only part of it Kaka-sensei. It’s got a list of jutsu he’s good at, the chakra-scalpel is on it… I looked it up cause that was kinda cool sounding and that’s... really advanced Kaka-sensei. A genin shouldn’t be able to use it like he does. He’s even cleared to use it offensively in the field. Kaka-sensei he should have gotten promoted just from *that* never mind everything else.”

Sakura finished the key – all four pages and handed it over for Kakashi to memorize with the Sharingan.

As Kakashi worked Sakura continued with what she found.

“I thought that was really weird plus with Namiko-senpai asking about that file and only that file… So I took it back and told Namiko-senpai that Kabuto-senpai… ugh… was super cool! And that medic ninjas were amazing and I wanted to know more about them! So he showed me a few more genin files and I started reading them… in the file room because then there isn’t a record…”

Kakashi closed his eyes (both!) to stop the splitting headache this damn key was giving him. This was more complicated the the one used to smuggle information out of Iwa during the third war. Holy shit, Kakashi was going to send Sakura straight into Intelligence - forget the frontlines, let T&I deal with this girl’s nonsense.

Kakashi held up a hand to stall the word vomit so he could ask his own question.

“How did you make this?”

“The code? Oh! We did a section on codes in the Academy and I thought they were super fun and Misuki-sensei had us make our own. And I wanted to make some so no one could read my diary but... I got carried away and made a bunch of codes…” Sakura shrugged that was the only answer she could give her sensei.

“This is… extreme.” Offered Kakashi, it sure as hell wouldn’t help her survive the third stage but goddamn it did give the kid options for her future.

Sakura grinned at the compliment. She wanted to make the code hard to break because this stuff was important and she didn’t want it to accidentally fall into the wrong hands. And get her dead.

“Oh! So I was looking through medic files and kept finding Kabuto in there. He’s got his hands… uhm… he’s involved… Uh. Anyways he’s part of almost every genin working in the hospital’s schedule and training. Which, I looked it up, Kabuto doesn’t have the sanctioning or ranking to do that. He just is. Its super weird Kaka-sensei.”
Kakashi was reading the scribbled and using the sharingan to translate. Must be nice to have a magic eye.

“But that’s not even the weirdest part Kaka-sensei. Yesterday while I was walking home… Kabuto came up to me and was all like ‘word on the street is you want to be a medic nin Sakura-chan!’ like I knew him!”

Kakashi snapped his head up at that. He gestured for the girl to go on.

“So I told him ‘well I’m not sure, I have to talk to my sensei about training first.’ And Kabuto said that ‘it shouldn’t matter too much since your sensei hasn’t been around to do much training, the whole village is talking about it.’ And Kaka-sensei I didn’t know what to do so I signed up for a basic medic class at the hospital to get out of that conversation.”

Kakashi, frowning, glanced down at the paper then held up a finger to stop Sakura.

It wasn’t an in-depth read but he quickly flipped through the notes and files Sakura had compiled on the suspect genin. Sakura obediently supplied the notes she had taken on the other files she’d accessed. He then took a look at the corresponding notations and theories surrounding the building conspiracy.

Sakura didn’t have enough information to know what exactly was going on but she clearly had found something. Something big that involved the hospital.

“That was the right thing to do Sakura. Take the class and learn something but keep an eye out. You’re right there’s something going on. Did you find anything else?”

Sakura nervously chewed on her lips as she thought about it. She did have other things but it was mostly paranoia and not quite… fact but. Maybe Kakashi could make something of it.

“Every genin that Kabuto has taken the chunnin exams with… has died. And uhm… there’s been some deaths in the medic program that don’t… make sense? I mean on their own its clearly accidents but if you look at all of them… I think Kabuto is killing people in the hospital. And I think he’s got a spy network… He’s got those info cards, its kinda his thing outside of being a medic, and… Namiko-senpai definitely told him I looked at his file. I’ve been pretending to be super impressed with medics and that Tsunade-hime is my idol but…”

“Do you have those files?” Kakashi frowned when Sakura motioned to the cabinet that tried to off him earlier.

“Yeah… I stopped taking files out of the records room so they wouldn’t be recorded. I asked Danuja-sensei about the seals and she said the record room was designed so no one could copy what you read in the room. Because sometimes people don’t need to know… so I memorize the files then write them down here in code and then read through to see what I found.”

“Who is Danuja?” This unknown woman kept popping up and was the mastermind behind the security.

“She’s uh… well… She lives in the Uzushio district… and she likes her privacy… a lot… and for a price she’ll help you with your own…” Sakura wasn’t exactly bound to keep Danuja’s secrets – she wasn’t blood after all – and they would slide easily out of an outsiders mind the second they started looking for her but… Sakura had to answer to her sensei, right? She kinda hoped Kaka-sensei would get the picture.

“She’s a seal-seabird?! Sight. A seer. –Seafaring boat. What the fuck Sakura. –Seeker. –Sidewinder.
Kakashi stopped before he hurt himself. Looked like those seals worked across the village, that was super cool maybe Sakura could get some when she stopped in to pick up her bearskin.

“Yep!” Said Sakura and left it at that. They both knew what the woman was even if she wouldn’t let them talk about it.

Kakashi pinched his nose and took a deep breath. This was beyond his paygrade. This wasn’t even in the realm of his pay. He was a frontliner and an assassin. He didn’t work in T&I for a reason.

“Ok. Here’s what we are going to do. Nothing.” Kakashi even dramatically crossed his arms for the full effect.

“I’m going to get T&I involved. You keep your regular schedule so no one thinks twice about it. Start looking up something different. Like genin assault squads of the second war. Tsunade was involved with training so it would fit the hero-worship.”

Kakashi paused to watch Sakura tidy up the room. Files and scribbles disappearing into shelves and books and cabinets and one was even sealed into a ramen cup – noodles and all. God, this kid… how the hell did the academy miss basically everything in her file.

“We,” he paused to point at the girl, “are going to start physical training every evening at 1700 hours until we stop. You need to drill in the morning before the research. We will… figure out the medic classes. Do not go without at least one of the pack.”

Sakura sat back down and Pakkun crawled into the girl’s lap. She’d done a good job so the pug let the girl stroke his toe pads.

“…Do you even want to be a medic?” It seemed important to ask at this point.

“No really…? I mean I think medics are really cool and super important but… I only looked into them because of… everything. Sensei.” Sakura paused pensive and unsure how to phrase it but tried anyways.

“I really like fighting, sensei. I don’t… think I’m sure good at it yet, not like the boys, maybe. But I want to fight…”

Kakashi’s eyebrows raised at that. The only reason the kids even made it to the third round was because of this girl and she thought she wasn’t as good as her teammates? Incredible.

His eyebrows reminded Kakashi to pull his headband back down.

“Well. Good. You’re my apprentice and no Hatake apprentice has ever been a medic. How did you make that happen anyways?”

Sakura just grinned in response while Pakkun avoided eye contact.

The three finished up and left the apartment once Kakashi was keyed into the wards. As he walked away the room’s location seemed to slide out of mind.

Kakashi slanted a look at the girl and said casually to her, “So let’s meet tomorrow, 1700 hours training field 4. Bye. Feed the pack.” And vanished.

He reappeared some distance back to watch the ANBU settle in behind the girl. Hound didn’t
recognize the mask and made note of it. Casually taking off to follow his usual schedule of staring at the memorial stone.

On his way back home if Kakashi got some take out from Yankiniku Q, well that was his own business. If he scribbled an extra little line on his heno-heno-moheji, he was just writing a little faster then normal.

If that receipt ended up falling out of the trash later that night and got picked up by sewer rat hoping for a snack that was fairly common.

So what if the rat ended up in the hands of a street urchin looking for a quick buck out of rat meat, who would second guess that.

And on and on it went until that receipt ended up on the desk of Yamanaka Inoichi at the crack of dawn the next day.

Inoichi took a look at the signature and sighed long and loud. He’d really been hoping nothing big would happen during this chunnin exam.

In Sakura’s room the pack dutifully ate strips of the key alongside the nummy treats she was handing out. It wouldn’t do for that to fall into the wrong hands.

THE PREVIOUS DAY

Kakashi decided it was time to reveal to the last loyal Uchiha why he was chosen to train team 7.

“Sasuke. Its time to work on your sharingan.”

“Pfsh. What would you know about it?”

“Well…” And Kakashi unceremoniously pulled up his headband.

Sasuke’s own sharingan flicked on defensively. “Why do you have that? How do you have that?!”

“Ahhh… it’s a long story… it was a gift?” Kakashi scratched at his cheek, he wasn’t about to give a preteen his life story now. Kakashi wouldn’t even give a level 8 friend his life story – and the only level 8 friend he had was around for a solid portion of it too!

Sasuke growled “You could have been training me this whole time!?”

“Well you didn’t have it until recently… and the exam got in the way you know… so here we are!”

Screeching, Sasuke experiencing about twenty emotions he didn’t want to deal with, lunged for his teacher’s throat.

Kakashi, unprepared for the attack, sidestepped it and reflexively chopped one hand down striking
the boy in the back of the neck. Sasuke crumpled to the ground unconscious.

Rubbing at the back of his head Kakashi sighed. This was going to be a long month.

Across the village Naruto met one of the Sannin and wasn’t very impressed by the whole ordeal at all and wondered what Sakura was getting up to. Something super cool and dangerous probably.

“Alright.” Said the latest weird white haired guy. “Just sign your name right there!”

“Ok… can I read it first?” Asked Naruto channeling as much Sakura-snootiness as he could.

“Uh… I guess. Usually people don’t… bother reading summoning contracts….” Jiraiya scratched at the back of his head confused.

“Sakura-chan says its important to know what you’re signing.” Naruto crossed his arms nodding aggressively. If Sakura said it was important that Naruto did a thing, then Naruto was gonna damn well do it.

“Well… if you want to. Here… we’ll uh, sign it… tomorrow.” The Sannin handed the boy the scroll, it was almost as big as Naruto was, and watched as the kid took it and trotted off into the city.

“That’s… unexpected. Whatever bet he doesn’t even read it. No one ever reads the small print.”

Chapter End Notes

I've been super sickkkkkkk its terribleeeeee

I'm sorry i haven't responded to the comments yet BUT IVE READ THEM ALL AND I LOVE ALL OF YOU ILL RESPOND WHEN MY BODY STOPS leaking

ok so haha sakura totally is trying to figure out why 2+6 isn't equalling four and Kakashi is like ...well. shit i didnt want to live into my old age anyways its been real y'all peace.

the boys are... well them and what is team gai up to??? who knows???? maybe neji got his arm fixed??? (he did it was Very Expensive - the clan is now keeping a tab on his medical bills intending to meet Sakura in civil court in the near future) ........pretend u didnt read that omg I'm adding it to the fic canon next lollll

THANK YOU FOR ALL THE DOGSSS IM SO HAPPY I LOVE DOGS AND I GOT TO HEAR ABOUT KINDS I DIDNT KNOW ABOUT YAYYYYY!!!! and a cool cat that acts like a dog. that was super valid

Andddddd~ now its time for another POLLLLLLLLLLLL: is it better to walk your dog in a cool park in the city where everyone can admire your dog OR to run wild in a field and play catch with you dog with no one else around for miles?

no beta we die like men and actually I've had a fever of like 101.7 for three days so it might be worse then normal byeeeeeee
Sasuke, the last of the Uchiha, had an eye appointment. Well specifically, he had an appointment last week that he blatantly skipped in favor of more training but Yamauchi Ryoko had probably tracked Kakashi down and given him the riot act. She seemed the type to either do it personally or pay for a whole-ass mission just for the sheer hilarity of watching a team of genin attempt it ad nauseam.

Either way instead of training Kakashi had shown up and frog marched the Uchiha to the clinic when straight up ordering Sasuke to go hadn’t worked. Sasuke protested the whole way and even tried to stab his teacher when it turned out that Kakashi on top of being a dramatic liar could also magically put in earplugs without the kid he was literally steering noticing.

Sasuke had to think of something really devastating to call Kakashi next time he saw the man. He hadn’t thought of anything yet but it would come to him eventually.

Right now though, Sasuke just had to deal with this entire eye exam nonsense. Looked normal, seemed fine, no he wasn’t getting dizzy anymore, yes he practiced everyday, no he didn’t have a blind spot that he noticed.

Wait.

Sasuke could physically feel his brain refocusing and wondered if this was what Naruto felt like anytime he saw something different then whatever he was currently looking at.

“Can… the sharingan have blind spots?” Because if they could…

Ryoko-Sensei looked up from her paperwork and for a moment Sasuke and the doctor just eyed one another in silence. Finally, the woman tapped her pen on the folder, closed it, then capped her pen. She didn’t set it down.

“Historically… there have only been a couple recorded since the village founding. But all dōjutsu have mutations… some work and some don’t. The sharingan is a weird one because it isn’t present from birth. Not in a way we can test for – it literally has to be awoken, best we can tell is through a traumatic event. Which implies that the ability is somehow tied to the limbic system. Or just you know, adrenalin rushes in general. There’s been studies arguing for either or.”

Ryoko paused to make sure her patient was understanding what she was getting at. The boy looked a little gobsmacked but unlikely to flee her exam turned lecture so she decided to continue since it had been a while since she had anyone directly relevant to this particular rant in her office.

“Typically any sort of weakness in the sharingan can be traced back to the user not training or other various reasons that just mean the sharingan isn’t being used enough. Occasionally, though we’ve seen cases where the sharingan itself causes weakness in the user… extreme chakra exhaustion, physical manifestations of illness, and even blindness when not using the ability. There’s been other issues reported but those tend to be the usual ones.”

The kid looked truly shocked at everything Ryoko was telling him. It wasn’t like it was a secret, there had to be reasons why a clan of literal jutsu stealing perfectionists didn’t all automatically become elite jounin, or even ninja for that matter. And even if this kid was literally the last one he should have access to his family records – what kind of idiot ignores literally generations of hard
work to figure this shit out only to muddle through like he was the first person to ever have the sharingan in the first place?

…Traumatized 7-year-old boys who just lost their entire life. Ok that was probably a no brainer, but in Ryoko’s defense she wouldn’t have let that distract her from any and all info she could get to eventually murder her evil sibling.

Reaching out she tapped the end of her capped pen on the kid’s nose.

“Still with me Cateyes?”

The boy blinked hard and tried to look offended at the tap but his budding excitement was showing.

“So…” Started Sasuke as casual as can be.

“I’mma stop you right there.” Ryoko held up a hand, the Uchiha clamped his mouth shut rather then risk offending this well of information.

“First of all with shinobi doctor-patient confidentiality extends past death. Second I don’t even have those files anymore for you to steal. And I don’t have shit on your brother to tell you, kid, even if I wanted to.”

Screw not offending this old bitch. Sasuke’s face twisted up in fury ready to let lose a barrage of insults so scathing that the hag would retire and never bother him again. Instead the woman reached out and tapped his nose again.

Sasuke tried to smack her hand or snatch the pen, either way the attempt failed.

“Cut it out! You’re useless!” Not as scathing as intended but Sasuke had been interrupted.

Rolling her eyes Ryoko shifted her stool around in a little circle for a second.

“Look, Cateyes. Fighting the sharingan is hard. Its been hard for a really fucking long time and now you only got half a set to train against. Its not a lot but coming to these appointments and making sure you or your eyes aren’t killing you is important.”

“Psh. Important? You’re just a medic.”

Ryoko’s spine snapped straight a little offended and mostly stunned. She didn’t get out much and hadn’t seen active combat since the third war but she grew up in the second. Got her first look at life the hard way on the frontlines. She knew that the medic program wasn’t doing great and that the village didn’t have nearly enough combat medics anymore but. Just a medic?

Reaching out she grabbed the kid by the front of his shirt before he could leave the room – arrogant shit thinks he can leave after that?

She put him back in the chair and leveled a Look at him. It wasn’t nearly as impressive as the first one but she also wasn’t fully recharged yet.

“Just a medic? Kid I dunno what they’ve been telling you but the best frontline assault shinobi this village has ever produced was just a medic.”

Ryoko thought about that and the sheer monsters Konoha tended to make and decided that no, yeah they all had their specialties and she was going to stand by what she said.

“Do you understand me?” This was important to Ryoko.
She knew she looked young, all medic nin did. But this kid hadn’t seen shit. Sure his family had been brutally murdered and he’d witnessed a portion of it but Ryoko had survived two shinobi wars. She’d been part of things that made that look like baby’s first rabbit skinning lesson.

“That’s not true. The best combat ninja the Leaf has ever had was the Fourth.” Sasuke wouldn’t admit to being intimidated but he was very alarmed. Also he knew his history and this cow wasn’t about to lie to him and get away with it.

“Did I say combat Uchiha Sasuke? No – you answer me. Did I say combat?” Ryoko let go of the kid’s shirt and crossed her arms so she wouldn’t grab the brat and shake some sense into him.

Sasuke thought about it.

“No. But -”

“Nuh-uh. You’re going to sit and you’re going to listen to me right now. I don’t know what people expect from you outside of my clinic but in here I demand respect for myself and for my craft. Konohagakure very well may not exist today if it wasn’t for a fucking medic and you need to learn some things real quick kid.”

Fuck not grabbing him. Ryoko uncrossed her arms and reached out to press her right hand against the kid’s chest. He flinched backwards into the chair and tried to pretend like he wasn’t shaking.

His eyes flickered red which gave her pause.

“Turn the eyes off. I wont have you copying this and dying later trying to work it out.”

She waited keeping very still until he did so. She wasn’t going to hurt him. There wasn’t any point to that. Maybe scare him a bit.

Her hand lit up green.

“There is no defense against medical chakra. None. Its wrapped around your lungs right now and you wouldn’t be able to stop me if I decided to kill you.”

For emphasis she stopped his breathing. Well she stopped the lungs ability to expand and inflate, she didn’t collapse it or anything overtly dramatic. But Sasuke did gape like a fish for a few seconds panic steadily rising. He did not try to fight Ryoko which was interesting. She’d made her point so she stopped and pulled her hand away.

Sasuke heaved for a second looking down at his lap. When he looked back up his eyes were sharp but not sharingan red.

“How does that make someone the best frontline assault shinobi?”

Ryoko grinned.

“Let me tell you about Tsunade-hime and the battle of Gohan Village.”

In Sasuke’s apartment Naruto squinted at the monstrous scroll. The part with the signatures was really long and had taken a while to unroll and when Naruto finally got to the text he had so much
unraveled parchment he had to stop and reroll starting from the other end so he didn’t accidentally break it or something.

Sakura and Pakkun liked to emphasize how important it was to take care of things you borrowed from other people and a summoning contract seemed like it fit. Sakura also said it was important to know when not to be careful but that was just a part of being a ninja so Naruto wasn’t worried about doing that wrong.

Now he was ready to start reading the contract. It was written really fancy and had a lot of legal verbiage but that seemed really standard. At first. Then it got kinda weird and now Naruto wasn’t sure what he was actually reading. It was really complicated and maybe Naruto was converting to a new religion if he signed it?

Naruto wasn’t even sure if he was part of a religion other then ‘ninjas were super badass and demons were super badass but also real and you should be worried about that implicit threat to… survival?’

He wasn’t sure exactly but the two times he’d gone into a shrine recently he just copied everything Sakura did so she would probably know. Naruto’d noticed Sasuke also covertly copying her. He’d wanted to trash talk the bastard but maybe it was more sad then funny when Naruto thought about it.

Maybe he needed to do some research before he continued reading?

Rolling away from the low table Naruto grabbed his haphazardly tossed kunai pouch and pulled out his super cool really heavy book of everything. He liked keeping it stored in the seal that was supposed to keep his bandages because Naruto didn’t really need bandages but sometimes he had really pressing questions and no one to ask.

Sitting back at the table he thumped the book down right on the scroll.

A moment of silence before Naruto – horrified and with a quick glance for a Sakura – scrambled to pick up the book and safely roll the scroll up and put it somewhere it wouldn’t get hurt.

(Naruto had no idea that sometimes the scroll doubled as a weapon and had once been used to pulverize a Iwa shinobi in a moment of desperation by a very young Jiraiya. It was in fact very sturdy and was made to be so. It did however, appreciate this little child trying to take care of it and intended on making him sign somehow someway in the next few days.)

Back with the book Naruto quietly looked up demons – for lack of a better reference of religion. Then had to specify the type of demons as actual demons not just imaginary demons in people’s heads.

It had a lot to say and kept mentioning this Sage guy which was wild cause Naruto had never heard of him before. So Naruto flipped to his page was was quietly floored by it. Then he somehow ended up on the Uchiha Clan page and, wow, those guys used to be wild.

Sasuke wasn’t very wild he was kinda… lame usually, actually, and very predictable. This clan was totally different and this Madara guy was probably a partier. Naruto knew the type.

That somehow lead to the Senju Clan and those guys where definitely partiers. And insane. Oh cool they founded Konoha. A footnote clarified that so did Madara which made Naruto grin.

Naruto paused to reassess what he was reading. This wasn’t actually what he wanted to look up in the first place.

Flipping back to demons Naruto was immediately distracted by spirits and ended up following a line
of interesting tidbits around until he was looking at a page about Senju Hashirama and his epic friendship with that Madara guy.

Naruto glared at the book. It wasn’t being very helpful today. (The Toad Scroll quietly campaigned from its place on top of a kitchen cabinet that it would be very helpful if the orange kid just signed.)

Sighing Naruto leaned back on his hands and looked out the window. Sasuke was super lucky he had a great view of the village and the Hokage monument. It was amazing to be able to see the mountain from a window and Naruto was always impressed by it even if he swore to never tell the bastard.

The Hokage monument.

Naruto squinted at it for a second feeling like he was on the cusp of figuring something big out.

Faces… of the Hokage… overlooking the whole village. Just there kinda glaring at the world.

That first guy… was Senju Hashirama.

Naruto redirected the squint at the book. He’d been looking up stuff to figure out this whole religion thing.

He turned back to the monument.

“Ahhh… man. I wish Sakura-chan was here.” Damn, Naruto wasn’t sure what he was coming up with exactly but he was onto something. He was sure of it.

Shaking his head, Naruto slapped his cheeks a few times then put his book away. Stretching he stood up to go find his teammates. He hadn’t seen ‘em in a while and needed to bounce some ideas off of them.

The first place he checked was super obvious but the regular training ground showed no signs of recent use so Naruto shrugged and continued on. It wasn’t like he knew where Sakura lived but she was keeping his old apartment for some super secret conspiracies. So he’d check there next.

Sakura didn’t like it when Naruto called it super secret conspiracies so he figured it was actually important and dangerous and agreed to just call it her office out loud. He also promised not to talk about the office to anyone and to mislead anyone that asked.

She had looked a little harried and wild eyed when he made that promise and Naruto knew, knew deep down in his prankster soul that Sakura was in the middle of something.

Setting off to the apartment at a trot Naruto kept a wary eye out for white haired guys up to no good. There was a surprisingly large number of them in the village and Naruto wasn’t a fan of this.

As he got closer to the apartment’s general location – however Sakura had managed to erase it was amazing and he was super impressed and wanted whatever it was – he slowed his steps into a lazy swagger. He wasn’t in a hurry to get anywhere and wasn’t going anywhere fast just casually wandering the village.

Naruto had been tailed by freaky ninja in scary masks his entire life to the point that as a kid he’d had a hard time deciphering people’s actual faces and not masks. He liked to mess with them on occasion and most of the masked dudes where super chill about it. Probably because they were super dangerous and knew it. Scary animals with big teeth tended to move slower then prey.
Naruto had read a whole section in his book about predator and prey animals and the weird omnivores that tended to fall into both categories at the same time. It was super cool and Naruto couldn’t help comparing ninja to the animals. It wasn’t a perfect comparison and sometimes fell kinda flat but Naruto was pretty sure of at least one animal comparison as accurate.

He grinned when he thought about it. Elephants sounded super cool and the Daimyo had a whole herd for his entertainment that had been shipped in from some far off land. Naruto personally thought that wasn’t super great of the Daimyo – his book had a whole section on invasive species and conservation efforts so he was suspicious.

Oh! Maybe he should look into that for the toad frog summon thing. That’d be bad if he summoned a toad that wasn’t suppose to be in that part of the world and it ate something outside of its ‘natural food chain,’ right? Maybe not since it was a summon…

Also he thought that one day Sakura was gonna grow up and turn into an elephant. She wasn’t one yet but he was pretty sure. Maybe. He should probably read up on other types of animals before he committed to that.

Anyways as he wandered into the building a big ninja with a mean face stepped into his path.

Naruto frowned up at the guy.

“What’s ya problem assface?! I live here!”

The man scrutinized Naruto for a second. He freaky hat face covering thing floated around and showed off some nasty scars.

“You sure you live here kid?” The guy asked.

And Naruto, who had been prepping for the moment he got questioned about his living arrangements and was a born showman (and a lair), puffed up his chest and pointed aggressively at the guy.

“Doncha know?! ‘M Uzumaki Naruto! The baddest ninja around ‘n its been that way for years! All theses other weak-boned chickenshit losers get outa my way when I get home ‘n you should too!”

Each insult was punctuated with an aggressive finger point till Naruto quite literally was in the big scary ninja dudes face (well midsection but the point stood). Naruto sure did hope he couldn’t hear heartbeats cause Naruto’s heart was beating a million miles a minute in fear and anticipation.

And then the man grinned. A short laugh followed. Scary scarred dude stepped back and still chuckling said “Uzumaki Naruto huh? Doncha know kid – we met in the first stage.”

And then he winked before walking away (Naruto assumed it was a wink but even with practice thanks to Kaka-sensei it was kinda hard to tell when you could only see one eye at a time).

Naruto watched him go feeling all his puffiness deflate with each step. Well shit. Maybe he shoulda took a better look at those files when whats-his-face with the mud showed him. Or was it that other dude?

Whatever, whatever. Time to go.

Hurrying the rest of the way Naruto almost, very nearly, forgot everything Sakura’d told him about going into the office from now on. Instead of busting in like he wanted to – and usually did wherever he went – Naruto took a deep breath and puffed up his cheeks as he tried to remember how to make his chakra behave so he could drag his pointer finger in the correct pattern so the seals wouldn’t kill
Sakura said that a lot of ninja had special seals around their doors and windows and that this was totally normal. Just like any other lock. But Naruto wasn’t sure about that. He’d see all kinds of alarms and traps and rigs around entries but not any seals, when he asked Sakura about it she’d frowned and said that everyone she knew growing up had at least the basic alarm seal on their door. Even Sasuke looked a little skeptical at that one.

Faintly Naruto could hear the click of the door unlocking and grinning he stuck his head around the door as he pushed it open.

“Pssstt Sakura-chan! You here?”

He waited a second for an answer and when he didn’t get one he walked the rest of the way into the room.

No one was around at all but Naruto was pretty sure Sakura had been by recently. Or Sasuke. As far as Naruto knew they where the only three who would probably survive whatever it was Sakura had going on in here.

It was unlikely to be Sasuke though, the weirdo seemed to get kinda twitchy behind the wards.

Shrugging Naruto wandered back out and almost walked off without locking up behind him. It was hard to remember! He’d never had anything worth really locking up before! Sure he might leave the door unlocked at Sasuke’s but it was the bastards own fault he didn’t have the place trapped to hell and back.

Squishing his face up Naruto concentrated on the second pattern to close the wards behind himself. The door made a little click to let him know he’d done it correctly.

Quietly cheering Naruto set out to look in the library and then the records room.

Those were totally surefire to be where Sakura was holed up.

And once he found her Naruto could tell her at length how quiet he’d been all day except for when that scary dude was interrogating him.

Sakura was in none of those places and instead was determinedly walking the halls of the hospital looking for that one office she was supposed to drop her class admittance forms at.

So far she’d been to three entirely separate departments, each one sending her off to the next, before she got tired of that and set about looking for a map. If no one knew where she was actually supposed to go then she couldn’t get in trouble for lurking.

Sakura was also trying her best not to jump at shadows. Shinobi were granted some leeway for fine tuned suspicion but it would look funny on a girl that maybe wanted to work here one day.

(Sakura did not want to work here one day. She did not want to be here at all. People died here. And not from injuries in the field either.)

Except she’d stumbled onto something dangerous and now she had to deal with that. Akino was
loyally following her around and so far no one had tried to kick the dog out though they had gotten a few looks. Sakura skedaddled out of those areas as soon as she noticed the faces people pulled at the dog. If Akino left the hospital then so was Sakura, not only had Kaka-sensei made it a requirement but she didn’t want to be here on her own.

Slinking around the corner of a nurse station Sakura paused to listen in on the gossip happening behind the counter.

“That poor boy. He should stop before he hurts himself anymore.” Sakura hears the first nurse say, genuine worry coloring his voice.

“Pft you kidding? At this point the kid half deserves it for not listening to us.” The second voice was clearly fed up with the entire situation.

“Yeah but he’d already had a rough go of it with his chakra being all… whatever it is. You’d think he’d cut it out before he really ruins his chances of recovery.” The third was solidly in the middle of the road.

“Ha. Who knows, maybe the kid’ll get picked for some experimental treatment or whatever. Wouldn’t hurt anymore then what he does to himself at least.” The second one voice was cool, despite how alarmed Sakura felt at the possibility.

She was about eighty percent certain they were talking about Lee, who’d been hospitalized after his fight with that freaky redhead, Gaara. Heart racing in terror Sakura took a quick peek around the corner to get a glimpse of the nurses.

That first nurse was smiling pleasantly and in the middle of responding to his coworkers when he noticed Sakura.

“Perhaps but I think his limited chakra- oh. Hello Sakura-chan! What can we do for you?”

It was Kabuto. Fucking great.

“I, uh.” Sakura faltered and Akino nudged the back of her knees to get her on track. She coughed slightly giving herself room to talk. Kabuto’s smile doesn’t move.

“I have paperwork for the medic class!” Sakura, for lack of anything better to do in the moment, hustled forward into the nurse station to shove the file at Kabuto.

She backs off quick enough, nervous, but hopefully they all think its from the possibility of being rejected outright from the program. (Impossible, the program hasn’t had enough applicants in nearly a decade to even consider rejecting even the poorest student.)

She digs her toe into the ground trying with all her might to look like a 12-year-old who doesn’t know much instead of a 12-year-old that spent half the morning explaining to the head of T&I her theories. Ino’s dad never seemed scary or intense when she was six but he was nothing like the playful man who knew a lot about plants during the interrogation.

Akio had shown up as her caseworker and so had Kakashi for moral support or something since he didn’t really have much to say. It had been a long day and then she had to key in about 10 different shinobi, including Morino Ibiki – who was terrifying, to the office. They didn’t need her files but they were interested in her notes and theories.

“Thank you Sakura-chan! We’ll get this processed and have you set for classes in no time! How’d your teams training been going for the third stage?” The other nurses perk up at that, maybe the kid’ll
slip up and they will get some insider info for betting purposes.

“Oh… well I’m not training with them right now since… we all made it… I’m actually on a break right now and I was about to visit a friend of mine! If you’ll excuse me,” quickly bowing out Sakura powerwalked down the hallway frantically keeping an eye out for Lee’s room. Akino trotting in a perfect heel to her left.

Behind her the nurses watch the kid go before the third one wrestles the file away from Kabuto. “Lemme get a look at that, heard that kid killed a bear! I wanna see what she’s got on file!”

Before Sakura found Lee’s room she had to make a quick pit stop in a bathroom and frantically hyperventilate in a stall for about five minutes. Akino stood guard by the door and let the kid calm down.

Once her brain was back online Sakura suddenly realized that one of her friends was hospitalized. As in: they couldn’t leave the hospital. Where people died. And she’d heard someone blatantly make a comment about experiments in public.

Lee. Wasn’t safe.

He was also, possibly, trying to train and could unintentionally injuring himself furthering his hospital stay. Oh god Sakura had to save him and keep herself alive. This was terrible.

A small evil self-serving part of herself wished she never realized Lee was in the hospital.

The thought made the girl smack her own cheek because those who turned their back on their teammates were worse then trash! It was the only thing Kaka-sensei taught them for like four months so it stood out as important. And probably something she should follow through on.

Moaning into her hands and stomping her feet in panic she cut it out when Akino gave a warning yip. Someone else came into the bathroom. Right ok she was also in public so she should probably get her shit together and go save Lee.

Step one of saving Lee meant she needed to find the gift shop. That decided Sakura opened the stall and ran out of the bathroom with Akino.

(The woman in the stall next door was faintly worried about a ninja who didn’t wash their hands or flush running around the hospital and made a note to send a general request that maintenance make new flyers insinuating you might get murdered for not washing your hands after you shit. Or pee. Or so much as think ‘I hope this conversation ends soon I really gotta go.’)

It was abundantly easier to find the gift shop than finding Lee’s room but that was ok. It just meant Sakura had time to think about step two.

Step two means she found a matching pair of sunglasses in the gift shop so that she and Akino could pull off the routine. She also spent an outrageous amount of money on kids toys but that was part of the point. And also she was doing this on the fly and the nearest 100 ryo shop was four blocks away.
And without further ado she smacked the door open and slid (with the help of some chakra) into the room. Akino slid in as well.

“Lee! My eternal rival! I have a challenge!”

She even struck a pose. So did Akino.

It took a second for the room to stabilize since she wasn’t, well, paying attention to anything but making sure her entrance was perfect so she had to blink really hard at Lee who was attempting to escape via the window.

Both children froze and stared at one another. Lee looked extremely guilty. Sakura squinted at the boy trying to decipher some code she missed.

“I’m sorry Sakura! I value our rivalry but I cannot accept! I have to train!” Lee wailed at the girl before flinging himself out the window.

Panicking Sakura lunged across the room ready to leap out and rescue the boy. She didn’t have to. Lee’s room was hard to find because it wasn’t where it was supposed to be and someone smart moved it to the first floor so he wouldn’t die doing precisely this. She poked her head out to peer down at the green groaning heap of a 13-year-old lying face down across a flattened bush.

“…I dunno Lee I think you should at least hear me out.”

Sakura – with Akino keeping an eye out for any wayward staff – helped Lee back in through the window and brush most of the dirt off. She also convinced him to sit on his bed and talk.

“You have a challenge for us? I am very sorry Sakura you will find me a poor rival now. I… am not my old self, I do not know if I’ll pose any sort of threat to your mastery.”

Lee sometimes talked like a samurai out of a historical drama combined with a stoned hippy. It was hilarious and honestly he did a better job of it then Gai-sensei usually.

So Sakura grinned and held out her preferred trial: logic puzzles. In her hands she held two copies of every single logic puzzle book – from word problems to Sudoku some of which were aged 4 and up. She’d also included mazes, crossword puzzles, I spy the thing, and even a coloring book. It was one hell of a haul and she’d made sure to grab two separate bags for the collection for ease of transportation.

Lee took the books and stared down at them for a long moment. He didn’t say anything and Sakura worried about his reaction let him think. Suddenly he turned to the girl flashing a blinding yet teary grin.

“I see! I understand now! Sakura you are worried that I have overdone training of the brawn and neglected the brain. It makes sense! I need to seek heaven since I’ve discovered earth!”

Relived that Lee didn’t take the challenge poorly Sakura grinned back as she laid out the rules.

“So winner picks the next challenge but! This is only phase one! We have to have two phases so the next part needs to stay on theme!” She wagged a finger at the nodding boy. And suddenly worried that he would stay up all night and complete them in one go she hastily added on extra rules.

“And! You need to spell everything correctly and have the correct punctuation! Also handwriting has to be nice! That’s part of the challenge! And uhm. We have to complete it book by book so if you finish one before me you have to wait till I catch up to continue. But if you’re waiting you can
redo the completed book as many times as you want.”

Lee was still grinning though it was starting to look a little strained.

“I… included a pack of pencils too.”

Unsure of herself and Lee Sakura trailed off and let her free hand drop down to pet Akino who came into the room at some point.

“I accept your terms! Let’s do this one first!” Lee held up the first logic puzzle book aged 4+.

Sakura nodded enthusiastically and both ninja shook hands on it. (It was more of a dramatic forearm clasp but they did so with the air of a ritual so it worked out.)

After running around in circles for hours trying to find Sakura and giving it up as a bad job Naruto returned home (Sasuke’s apartment).

Of course that meant that she was perfectly at home sitting at the low table across from Sasuke like she hadn’t been missing for days.

Squawking Naruto pointed a shaking finger at the girl. She didn’t even open her eyes to acknowledge it. Busy inhaling steam of the tea Sasuke definitely made her (and refused whole heartedly to make or even share with Naruto).

“You! You – where have you been?!” Naruto’s voice cracked at the end.

That had Sasuke grinning into his own cup of tea and Sakura finally opening her eyes to frown at the blond.

“At the hospital.” Even though she didn’t say it both boys heard the ‘duh’ loud and clear.

Which didn’t make sense because why was Sakura at the hospital? Oh shit, she got hurt!

Both boys jumped to the same conclusion near instantaneously and made eye contact to convey their mutual panic at the thought. In sync they whipped their heads back to the girl ready to find out everything and who they needed to kill (which body they needed to bury was more likely).

Sakura, who was apparently telepathic, snorted before either could ask and said, “To turn in paperwork for a basic medic class.”

Oh. Well. That cleared nothing up. At least not for Naruto, Sasuke though seemed to get something out of it and was nodding thoughtfully.

“Can you sign me up for it?” asked Sasuke.

Naruto gawked at the boy and belatedly moved out of the entryway and into the apartment. That was nothing on Sakura’s reaction though. She slammed her tea down and lunged across the table to grab Sasuke by the shoulders looking a little wild eyed.

Sasuke, also a little wild eyed, flinched so hard he tumbled backwards to sprawl on the floor. Sakura got a little stuck on the table and managed to knock everything, including the steaming tea, off. She
did manage to hold onto Sasuke’s shirt though, so he looked a little like a hanged man.

The “What!” was more a squeak then a yell but it had some impressive volume for the Uchiha.

And Naruto’s “Whoa Sakura-chan…” was a breathy sort of whisper full of awe.

“Did someone approach you about the hospital?! You can’t go there, people die there. Its not safe!” It came out as a weird combination of panicked whisper and furious screech.

Sasuke in the process of holding his hands up in the classic ‘I surrender’ seems to remember he’s an asshole and smacks at the girl instead, rolling frantically away and out of dodge. Sakura, with nothing supporting her all of a sudden, does a slow plummet face first off the table.

Naruto watches the whole thing with unholy glee. He knew being on a team with these idiots was going to turn out great.

Sakura leaps back up arms crossed in an X.

“No! I forbid it!”

That makes Sasuke scowl.

“You can’t stop me! If I want to be a medic, then I’m going to be a medic!”

It had been a while since anyone but Neji outright refused the girl and it showed by the immediate glare and raised fist Sasuke got. The Uchiha took a panicky step back, sharingan flicking on defensively.

That makes the kids freeze for a second – Sasuke belatedly let the eerie red fade away looking a little embarrassed.

The other two are busy glaring at one another and forget about Naruto entirely so Sakura doesn’t see his aborted hop. Naruto, desperately, wants to leap to Sakura’s defense but he knows he’ll probably end up as a matching smear on the wall to Sasuke’s own bloody imprint if he does.

So he does the next best thing.

“I know!” shouts Naruto raising a hand like he’s in the academy again, “We should all take the class!”

“What!” Sakura whips her fiery glare at Naruto who suddenly wished he could turn on creepy red eyes defensively. Not that that would slow Sakura down if she really wanted to do some damage.

Before she can say anything else Sasuke shouted (!!) “Seconded!”

Feeling the power of teamwork Naruto came back with “Team vote – majority wins!”

Sakura, gaping, whips her head back and forth trying to decide which idiot she needs to put into a coma first to save from themselves.

That makes her stop because if she puts them in a coma they’d end up in the hospital anyways without any means of defense.

Snapping her jaw shut with a click Sakura hisses out a breath of air debating with herself. The boys watch pensively. Sasuke looks ready to dive out the nearest window – through the glass and all – if this goes south.
“Fine! Fine, but if we do this I am never! Ever!” she punctuates with a violent finger jab at each boy – terrifying even half a room away, “going to be the team medic!”

She looks so proud of herself that the boys turn helpless looks on one another, because? Yes? Why would she? She’s the captain? You can’t have all the important jobs that’s just plain greedy.

Deciding to just go with it both boys nod in agreement. Sakura nods back sealing the deal. She goes to sit back at the table only to pause and blink at the mess.

“Someone should clean that up before we talk about how you two are going to behave at the hospital.”

Chapter End Notes

GYUSSSSSSSSS WHADDUP?!

Thank you all so much for the love on the last chapter!!! I was super motivated and got this sucker ready pretty quickly! (i was so sick but theres only so much u can do suck at home that you start writing out of self defense eventually)

also! if anyone is interested i might have a oneshot about Tsunade-hime and the battle of Gohan Village that i could totally crank out if anyone actually wants to read it. I also thought of another AU while i was writing and anyways thats going to be a few months off since i have the origin of one h Sakura in the works rn but for those interested its about Sakura anddddd war time. :D

Anyways if you cant tell from the fic i have a lot of feelings about medics in the Naruto universe which ranges from 'wow i fucking hate it' to 'this is literally the coolest thing anyone has ever thought of' on an hour to hour basis.

Poll!!!: if you could take one skill from Naruto (universe) and make it real irl what would it be and why? AKA a clan thing counts as one thing so like the Inuzaku and their understanding of dogs, dog-ish everything, and having super awesome dog partners to go about life with.
Kakashi slunk into the Hatake clan compound in the early hours of the morning. Honestly he was hoping anyone that could be awake wasn’t so he could turn around and book it across the village home. He hated being here and hated that he had no other choice even more.

Yesterday Kakashi had taken Sakura to one of the various training grounds to work on her taijutsu. He’d goaded her into a spar then pushed every button he could find to make her angry. And boy did that work.

Kakashi wasn’t a taijutsu specialist for a reason. He worked on the frontlines because he was a perfectionist and a damn good ninja but he wasn’t built for sustained combat and it was becoming clear that one day Sakura would be.

Kakashi specialized in shadow work, it was his true home and even though he had the sharingan and often worked on jutsu retrieval squads it didn’t mean he liked it. It had also done some annoying things to his reputation as a combat operative. Which was… awful for shadow work. As Genma and his bridge were now finding out.

But there was no chance in hell that he couldn’t take a genin on the worst day of his life so, now in perfect health, he could manage just fine.

Except Kakashi had made the mistake of catching one of Sakura’s angry driving punches in the palm of his hand. He hadn’t known instant regret like that for a while. Not in the last decade probably. The decade prior for sure, but nothing current.

It hurt. A lot. More then any punch from a genin should. Maybe an Akimichi kid could slug one out like that but goddamn. He’d instantly wanted to shake out his hand but figured that was probably a bad idea on account of not being able to move two fingers. So instead he put on a burst of speed grabbed Sakura with his good hand and threw her across the training field.

She landed in a heap and got up slightly dazed so Kakashi had sent her home.

Then in the empty field Kakashi had to peel off his glove and come to the embarrassing conclusion that Sakura had broken his hand and he needed to go find a medic.

So now, hours and one paid off medic later, Kakashi was coming home for the first time in two decades.

And he wasn’t in luck. Aunt Reiko was dozing on a porch and lifted her head to turn milky eyes his way as Kakashi strolled up the path. Great. This was the last family member Kakashi wanted to meet right now.

Kakashi was the heir and the last shinobi the clan had ever produced, he had a cousin who was a farmer and might father a couple of kids eventually but who knew. All signs pointed to Kakashi being the last and the elders didn’t give much of a shit anymore. If they had they would have done something about it before Sakumo had been born. Which was like an eternity ago.

Aunt Reiko was something like Kakashi’s great great something aunt and had been present for the founding of Konoha. She’d watched the clan slink in from the highlands of Iron and transform from
the samurai of their initial vocation into some of the deadliest shinobi to ever walk. Reiko had been a nightmare in the field.

Her human daughter, Hatake Aniu, had died nearly 40 years ago on the battlefield just prior to the official start of the second war and Reiko retired four months later, hunger and revenge sated.

The rest of the pack had been dispersed across the remaining Hatake while the old wardog took up the position of elder and guardian of the Hatake. She also doubled as custodian while Kakashi fucked around and avoided his responsibilities like the piece of catshit he was.

So no, she was equally unhappy to see (smell, she’d been blind for two decades now) his masked face come strolling up her path.

Her lips lifted in the barest hint of a growl and Kakashi froze. He would never admit it on pain of death but Aunt Reiko told him once she would eat him if he ended up being the runt of the litter and he’d held a nagging suspicion she’d follow through when he least suspected it.

“What are you doing here runt?” Ah yeah, he should run away.

Instead his feet didn’t move and Kakashi sheepishly raised a hand like a fool to scratch at the back of his head. The louder growl made the movement freeze before dropping his hand like it was made of lead. Right ok, don’t bullshit the top bitch.

Clearing his throat Kakashi says the only thing he can.

“I need a puppy.”

Aunt Reiko pulls her lips back and tosses out the meanest laugh Kakashi has ever heard in his life. It shows off all of her teeth. Some of them a faded and gray and some are missing entirely but Kakashi doesn’t doubt the massive animal could tear him to shreds in moments if she truly wanted to. Sharingan or no sharingan.

“A puppy? Can’t find anymore from the trash? No more, runty Inuzaku pups to fill your ranks? Mixed blooded curs?” Her words were cruel and biting. There’s a reason Kakashi’s pack was so dissimilar to the Hatake packs of old and Aunt Reiko was reason number one.

He shifts foot to foot. This is nerve wracking, Kakashi knows the Hatake breeding program had kept up, sure they had slowed it down with the clan shrinking so rapidly but there should be something available.

“Its… for my apprentice.” Kakashi didn’t like throwing Sakura under the bus but he was going to and he would do it again. Especially when faced with the Tatakau Yama-Inu. The wolf had earned her name at the tail end of the Warring States era and though the mountain dog slang had fallen out of usage there was no mistaking this monster for something domesticated.

The wolf frowned, she’d heard rumors whispered in the wind that the runt had picked up a stray but she hadn’t expected it to be true. Not to this extent at least. His own pack was an embarrassment to the clan. They weren’t Hatake bred and didn’t understand there was no separation between pack, two legged or four.

Kakashi had found the first one cast off in the gutter when he had been a child and despite her warnings had raised and nurtured the beast. So far Kakashi hadn’t chosen a Hatake wardog and none of the clan had offered any pups to him for it.

That he would come for his apprentice was galling. Made her teeth ache and her stomach rumble.
She stood to her full height, about 7 and a half feet, and stepped carefully off the porch.

The buildings – few and far as they were – of the Hatake clan were originally designed to accommodate the massive size many of the wardogs grew to. Reiko wasn’t the largest there had ever been but in this day in age she might be the end of the giant monsters. The birthing bitches were growing smaller without humans to act as chakra focuses in youth, it was worrisome but only to a degree.

Though she couldn’t see it she knew the runt had squeezed his eye shut in terror. He hadn’t changed much from that squalling babe Sakumo brought her to judge. She hadn’t eaten him then but, oh, how she wished she had.

Her nose brushed along the side of Kakashi’s head, easily the same size. He smelled like fear and determination and pain – new and sharp though fresh healed.

“Your hand - show me.” She could hear him swallow as he lifted the appendage. Maybe he thought she would bite it off, she certainly could – it was within her right.

She carefully sniffed pulling secrets out and sorting through the mess. Chakra healing was relatively new and left an odd sharp lingering scent that had annoyed her on the battle field. Here it was no less distracting but she pulled past the healing and the medic to the depth of injury and the slightest hint of the confirmed apprentice.

Oh yes she knew what the runt had been up to. She kept nose to the ground and let the world tell her what was happening outside the clan. (Her spies would put the greatest of human shinobi to shame – no one suspected the birds.)

There was only a touch of the girl left and it left an entertaining aftertaste across the back of Reiko’s tongue. That was unexpected and intriguing.

Laughing Reiko circled the jounin, her massive frame dwarfing his.

Kakashi, stock still, barely breathed as Aunt Reiko returned to her spot in the sun. Paws crossing delicately as if she was a pet and not a true monster. He didn’t dare speak waiting for Aunt Reiko to pass judgment on whatever she’d found.

“Do you know Saiua?” The wolf asked apropos of nothing.

Thrown Kakashi shrugged before remembering that his Aunt couldn’t see.

“Uh, yes. My cousin?” She’d only served a year before being blown half to smithereens by the Bomb Brigade during the Third War.

“She has a litter on the way. Bring your pup in two months time.” Well great now Kakashi didn’t actually know who Saiua was. He’d thought she was human but maybe she wasn’t? Or was she heading up the breeding program now? Who knew? Not Kakashi, he tried to stay firmly out of clan affairs and generally preferred the duck n cover technique whenever he saw a cousin in the grocery store.

“She’s not – uh, ok. Thank you Reiko-obasan.” Kakashi went to correct the wolf and promptly changed his mind at the flash of tooth he got for his efforts.

Bowing sharply before stepping back Kakashi promptly fled the compound as fast as his skinny useless legs could take him. Aunt Reiko’s laugh following him out.
Naruto had yet to sign the Toad Scroll. He had almost forgotten about it shoved up on top of the kitchen cabinet.

Sakura had talked into the early hours of the morning about how they needed to behave. She whispered that it was super important so Naruto figured it had something to do with her office set up and agreed to do as the girl said.

Sasuke agreed to the terms because when he tried to refuse Sakura had gotten a crazy look in her eye and threatened to make Kakashi make Sasuke listen.

Since they were all taking the same introductory class they came and went from the hospital together. Naruto was so far behind; he couldn’t even read half the words on the bored as the lame sensei lectured the class. So Naruto spent most of his time reading out of his book of everything.

Sasuke was absorbing everything and hanging off every last word. After class he would walk out of the building with the rest of the team before running off somewhere.

Sakura… was just plain crazy. She was super competitive so nothing was gonna stop her from being the best but also she kept shooting people suspicious glares and looming over the boys shoulders when anyone tried to talk to them. (The time Naruto spotted that Kabuto motherfucker and tried to point him out was never to be repeated. Naruto had no idea Sakura knew how to talk without moving her face or make bodily threats without so much as twitching.)

On the one hand it was kinda cool and sweet (or something super paranoid) but also Naruto really wanted some space.

So he was hiding. At home (Sasuke’s apartment) lying under the table trying not to think about the scroll he needed to read or the gross anatomy lessons getting crammed into his head.

Sasuke came back at night from wherever he was and studied. Naruto was pretty sure the bastard had never studied a day in his life before. He didn’t move out from under the table and made the asshole work around him.

Sasuke sat on Naruto’s ankle for two whole hours and Naruto didn’t even complain because he wasn’t done hiding from the world and he figured it had to be super uncomfortable for the bastard so they both lose.

And then Sakura slammed the door open so hard the handle got stuck in the wall.

Both boys flinched jerking away from the violent girl. Sasuke went backwards while Naruto scrambled sideways knocking over the table and somehow ending up in Sasuke’s lap.

Sakura stood in the entryway chest heaving, eyes on fire. (Sasuke’s eyes were actually on fire the tomoe spinning wildly, Naruto really wanted some red eye deterrents.)

Shoulders shuddering with the force of her breaths couldn’t be squared even though Sakura wanted to. Akino stayed in the hallway.

“Did you know we have a quartermaster?”
Sakura’s voice was deceptively calm for her …everything.

Sasuke was clutching the back of Naruto’s shirt tight enough to almost strangle him. There was ink spilling across the floor.

“Yeah. There’s a fucking quartermaster. Who gets a portion of our pay. For every mission.”

Naruto glanced up at Sasuke trying to catch his eye, it worked because demon eyes had excellent peripherals and Sasuke saw it without glancing down. Naruto didn’t know that, so he had to look back at Sakura without the reassurance that he wasn’t the only one who didn’t know what the fuck was going on.

“We have a quartermaster who gets part of our pay because they supply us with …whatever!”

She waved her hands around wildly trying to convey the point physically.

“Its. A. Scam.”

She was still breathing really hard and Naruto was a little worried about the future existence of this quarter dude. Sasuke hadn’t turned off the freaky red eyes yet so he definitely didn’t know what was going on either.

Naruto and Sasuke stayed glued to one another watching wearily as Sakura regrouped. She beckoned Akino and Pakkun (who’d been out of sight) into the apartment before she closed the door. She had to yank it out of the wall and Sasuke made a weak noise of protest at the hole. At least from all the D-ranks they’ve done everyone in the apartment had a solid understanding of how to patch a wall. It was just, you know, the matter of having time to actually deal with it.

Both boys realized how they were sitting at the same time and scrambled away from one another as Sakura came fully into the room. She had a messenger bag slung across one shoulder. She plunked down and when neither boy approached or made any attempt to right the room she gestured angrily at them.

They hustled to clean up the mess while Sakura carefully unpacked her bag. Three whole entire folders, four scrolls, about a dozen kunai of varying quality and sixteen shuriken. Naruto wasn’t about to try counting the pile of senbon.

And then she dumped out her hip pouch, thigh holster, and all the pockets of the vest she had refused to give back after the Forest of Death. Those piles were pretty impressive on their own. All together Naruto had a weird feeling that it was more weapons then either boy had ever seen in their lives. A glance at Sasuke didn’t confirm that theory but he looked mildly impressed so…

Both boys sat back down while Sakura sorted the weapons, and other supplies, into arbitrary piles. It clearly wasn’t by type so who knows. A loose sheet of paper had a list of equipment with little ticks in different colors next to the names.

“So… what’s a quarter thingy?” Asked Naruto.

Sasuke sighed, put upon, and answered before Sakura could start yelling again.

“They’re in charge of weapons and supplies.”

“Oh. So like how come I’ve never met one?”
“Exactly!” The boys glanced over at the girl surprised by her outburst.

Oh, Sakura was done with her… piles. Ok. She also seemed ready to talk at a normal volume so the boys shifted to focus on her. (Naruto made sure to give Akino, lying next to him, an extra pat for putting up with Sakura for the last couple of days. He was a good boy.)

“I was talking with Tenten earlier about her sealing scrolls and I was all ‘they’re so expensivee e ughhhh’ and Tenten was like ‘just go get some from the quartermaster’ and I was like ‘what quartermaster that’s not how it works’ so we went and asked Gai-sensei cause Tenten hadn’t ever seen the quartermaster either just heard about it.”

Sakura paused to organize her thoughts. She looked angry for some reason. Both boys smelled blood in the water and leaned forward ready to find out who needed to die.

“And Gai-sensei said that the quartermaster is suppose to supply us with everything we need for missions. And! And – the department gets a cut of our mission pay for funding.”

The boys leaned back trying to work through what that meant.

“So I looked it up! Every mission, all of them! Cost the same for whatever rank they are. But we don’t get paid the same for each mission do we?” Sakura’s eyes darted around wildly.

“I don’t know how I didn’t know this! But the quartermaster gets their cut before we do. AND I’VE NEVER GOTTEN ANYTHING FROM THEM!” The last part was so loud Naruto clamped his hands down over Akino’s ears figuring if his own eardrums burst they’d heal up by tomorrow.

Pakkun had buried his head in a pillow before the meeting had started.

“…I use Uchiha gear.” Sasuke offered up to the girl. He wasn’t exactly following but taking a step back and looking at it Sasuke understood that they weren’t getting all the money for the missions. That sounded right, the village did need to take out its portion so day to day operations could continue as normal but Sakura wasn’t talking about that. She was talking entirely about gear and supplies.

“The old man gave me my first kunai! But uh… I had to get the rest on my own…” Naruto was frowning trying to remember exactly how he’d come into possession of most of his stuff. Stealing from the mask stalker dudes didn’t really count.

Sakura pointed at her three piles.

“My parents bought me this, I bought this, and I found this. None of it came from any quartermaster. What about your kits?”

There was a little bit of disorder as both boys dumped out their hip pouches and thigh holsters. Sakura waited for them to organized everything up.

Turned out nothing, as far as they could figure, in the whole apartment had come from the quartermaster.

Pakkun, watching the kids do their thing, spoke up cutting straight through Naruto’s thoughtless ramblings about the time he pried a shuriken out of the nostril of the Second Hokage.

“What about the clothes to go undercover?”

Sakura frowned muttering something about burning most of it. She twisted to scribble on her list.
Sasuke caught on faster than Naruto and went to go find the clothes he’d stuffed in his closet. Naruto rolled away and grabbed the strap of his pack to sort through.

There was more of a mess as Sakura realized that there were a few other things in their possession that could have potentially been supplied by the village. Bedrolls, tents, pots, pans, rations, water sterilization tablets, bandages, firestarters, bear repellent, winter gear, desert gear, flares, weapon maintenance kits, and an abundance of things every academy student bought for the day they would become ninja sent out on crazy missions that needed supplies for any little thing that could possibly happen.

About an hour later Sakura was muttering angrily and sorting through everything and Sasuke was back to aggressively studying for the medic class. Naruto wasn’t sure what to do. He didn’t really want to study and he definitely wasn’t about to go near Sakura right now. He’d mess up the piles or something and she’d, like, skin him alive then make him eat his own flesh.

Shuddering Naruto redirected to the Toad Scroll above the cabinet. (It tried really hard to look appealing to the kid.)

“Hey… Pakkun-sensei?”

Pakkun looked up interest perking. “What’s up kiddo?”

Naruto scrunched his face up. “Could you help me… with the scroll thing pervy- uh, Jiraiyaya-something something gave me?”

Ohooo yes Pakkun sure could. Grinning a doggy grin Pakkun trotted over to the kid. “Yeah sure whatcha got?”

Naruto obediently fetched the scroll unrolling it on the ground so the dog could look it over. Naruto slowly read out loud to the dog. It was a very slow and tedious process that caught Sasuke’s attention.

“That’s not right.” Sasuke broke Naruto’s slow barrage of words. Cutting in when he wasn’t invited.

Not right? Fucker it was none of your goddamn business.

Pakkun, who was a dog and never bothered becoming fully literate and was having a hard time himself following along, looked up. “What isn’t?”

“Here.” Sasuke scooched over to see what Naruto was reading and pointed at the archaic kanji. “That’s not the right reading. It’s not ‘follow the path of the mountain’s shadow’ it’s ‘obey the way of the sage.’ Don’t you know how to read?”

Naruto flushed mortified. Words were hard and divining the meaning of ancient archaic kanji was even worse. His eyes darted to Sakura hoping she hadn’t noticed. She had but she kept silent watching everything play out. She was idly chewing on the end of a pen.

“Look its super complicated! If you want to read it then go ahead!” Naruto ended up yelling, trying to bluster his way through embarrassment. He’d thought, until that moment, that he had been doing pretty good. He was careful and had gone slow and even managed to correct himself a few times. But maybe he wasn’t as facetious as he hoped.

Sasuke growled and went to yank the scroll away but Naruto let out a screech of rage and lunged at the boy. He’d been so careful with the scroll Naruto wasn’t about to let some asshole hurt it. (The Toad Scroll appreciated the sentiment but also this adorable baby needed some help reading and
should have let it happen. He’d misread... the majority of the toad intransigence sub-clause. Not to mention the legal ramifications of sending a toad out against a fourteen headed rabbit.)

The idiots wrestled on the ground, careful not to touch any of the various piles Sakura had painstakingly made. Naruto tried to shove Sasuke’s face into the ink stain and only managed to get some on his hair instead. It wasn’t even like you could tell! Sasuke’s hair was already black! It wasn’t fair!

Pakkun was busy pawing at the scroll, it had been pretty interesting to read one of the major animal summons legalities. Also a little boring. Turning his head to get a good glimpse of the writing from every angle he sniffed the scroll carefully looking for any type of deceit. (The Toad Scroll tried to smell like something other then ink and paper and old blood. Didn’t really work.)

Sitting back Pakkun carefully continued on with the reading as far as he could until the scroll needed to be unraveled some more. Sakura, refereeing the impromptu match, helpfully unrolled and then rerolled on the other side.

Pakkun, copying humans, patted her leg with a paw – it earned him a beaming sort of smile so clearly it worked as a reward.

For the most part it was fairly standard. Incredibly standard actually. Sure there were some particulars partial to toads but it read like the most basic summoning contract out there. Pakkun would know, he himself was part of a summoning contract.

Not that it was anything big or fancy like this but just something so Kakashi could call the pack whenever he had need. (Always. The dumbass always had need even if he didn’t use his goddamn brain to figure it out.)

Satisfied with the mysteries of important people Pakkun had Sakura reroll the scroll. She paused on the last few signatures looking a little stunned. Her finger traced the newest one – some two decades old – in amazement.

“That’s... that’s the Fourth Hokage.” She barely whispered it. Awe spread across her face.

Pakkun nodded. He’d really liked Minato-sensei.

“Yep. He didn’t use the toads a lot but it was impressive when he did.” Pakkun gave a wry dog grin at the girl who redirected to the pug.

“You saw him fight?” Her face was lighting up, a million questions sparkling behind her eyes.

“Sure did. Couple times even. Pretty hard to miss actually. Bit of a nightmare when he had to come in and save Kakashi’s dumb ass.” Pakkun gave a dramatic shudder thinking of a couple of missions that could have gone worse without the interference of the Yellow Flash.

“...Why was he saving Kaka-sensei?”

“Same reason Kakashi would save you three, probably.”

Sakura sucked in a deep breath, chest expanding in delight. “You mean he-?!”

Pakkun winked. “Shhhh it’s a bit of a secret now-a days.”

“What is?!” Demanded Naruto. The fight had fizzled out and the boys only caught the tail end of the whispered conversation.
Thinking fast Sakura grinned and said “The Fourth was the last person to sign the Toad Scroll.”

The Toad Scroll tried to look extra appealing when the boys’ eyes darted down to it.

“Whoaaa. I wanna sign now for real…” So that was that for Naruto.

Sakura did make him stop and listen to everything Pakkun had to say on the small print (archaic print really). The Sage thing was a little confusing but Naruto figured that since he wasn’t currently following any sort of doctrine it didn’t matter.

When he said as much to Sakura she huffed and crossed her arms. She also didn’t have much of a rebuttal since it was turning out that everything she thought of when thinking about spirituality was completely different then the boys. She figured since everything else that had come up, mostly seal usage, was completely different so it followed. Maybe.

And then Naruto shrugged and said when he tried to look it up in his book he kept ending up on pages about the Shodai and some wild Uchiha guy named Madara. That had caught Sasuke’s attention and he demanded to see what Naruto’s book had on the Uchiha.

Proud Naruto pulled out his book and the boys settled into a corner to flip through the pages utterly fascinated. And completely distracted within about two minutes of reading about the gunbai uchiwa and headed down a sinkhole of other wacky weapons from the Warring States era.

Sakura watched this play out entirely put upon. She was teamed with a bunch of ignorant morons and the only one seeing the truth was her! The hospital was dangerous, the world was dangerous, the village was dangerous! And so was she! She was going to be the most dangerous and save her team from itself and everyone else!

Pakkun sighed happy at the kids working together (sorta?) and settled in to help Sakura fill out requisition forms. If they couldn’t get their money back, they were damn well gonna get their supplies.

Haruno Mebuki opened her door to the ominous knock and had to look up. And then looked up some more.

Her first thought was ‘oh shit the Inuzuka found out’ her second was ‘fuck that sure as shit isn’t a dog.’

She slammed the door in its giant furry face and heaved for a second in the privacy of her own home. It was cool, she was fine, it didn’t eat her so it was clearly not here about the KOP sanction her last suit had destroyed – so she was still in the clear on that one.

Living in Konoha meant you had to get used to strange and unusual sights very quickly and for Mebuki, who was nothing but a mere civilian, it was a tough atmosphere to navigate.

(It was not. Mebuki might not have been a shinobi or formally trained in, well, anything, but she was the illegitimate child of a samurai and had one hell of a reputation to uphold as the last heir.)

(That was a lie but all the best ones are the kind you live with every fiber of your being.)
Sucking in a deep breath she opened the door again. The monster was still there sitting on the stoop now. With the second look she realized it wasn’t quite as large as originally thought, perhaps about six feet and small change at most. Which, granted, was still fucking enormous but not unmanageable.

Eyes darting both ways down the street looking for gossipers Mebuki offered a slight nod of her head to the dog. Animal. Wolf? Canine.

“Hello, can I help you?” Best to be polite with ninja animals (its leaf insignia was front and center across its chest). Unless they were the ten or however many Sakura had started bringing around. Then you had to be firm and withhold treats no matter how hard they bargained Kizashi.

It pulled its lips back showing teeth and said “I’m here representing the Hatake clan for the apprenticeship of your daughter, Haruno-san. May I come in so we might discuss terms?”

Oh. Oh, well then.

Smiling Mebuki stepped into her doorway towards the beast.

“I don’t think we’ve been introduced. I’m Haruno Mebuki, Sakura is my daughter. You are?”

The canine nodded its massive head. “I am Kuma of the Hatake clan. My cousin, Hatake Kakashi, is your daughters jounin teacher.”

Mebuki’s eyebrows shot sky high at the cousin bit. Everyone knew the Inuzuka were incredibly close with their dogs but word on the street was they were just like that and not actually part dog. Mebuki put it up as spiritual nonsense and left it alone.

But a giant animal calling Kakashi, who looked human enough to Mebuki last time she saw him (yesterday swiping leftovers from her goddamn fridge at two am), cousin was interesting. The dog had the same gray coloring as the jounin but that meant basically nothing. Maybe it was just a crazy clan thing. That was fine Mebuki could pull crazy clan things out of the woodwork all day long. Plus she did know for a fact the Hatake were verging on defunct and maybe she would find out why.

Stepping back, she pushed the door open as far as it went and welcomed Kuma into her home.

In the living room Kizashi glanced up when Bull (who’d been happily providing the perfect foot rest for the promise of treats straight from the table) suddenly lurched to his feet.

Mebuki was coming back, angling for the formal sitting room since it was the least furnished room and had enough space for …whatever was following her.

“Dear?” Called Kizashi setting aside his paper and idly petting down the hackles across Bull’s back.

“Oh! Kuma this is my husband, Haruno Kizashi. Kizashi this is Kuma from the Hatake clan – he’s here to talk about Sakura’s apprenticeship!” She said it with a bright smile like there was nothing wrong about talking terms with a- a dog! Or something. It didn’t really look like any dog Kizashi had ever seen.

“Thank you for welcoming me into your home Haruno-san.”

Ah it spoke too. Great.

Smiling weakly at Kuma, Kizashi missed the sharp look Bull shot the other canine. Mebuki didn’t though and softly patted her thigh asking Bull to come over.
The dog did, keeping a weary eye on the other animal.

“I see my cousin’s pack has already settled in with his apprentice’s family. That is good. It speaks very highly of you, Haruno-san.”

Mebuki blinked, the dogs were Kakashi’s? She’d figured that, but it was nice to have definite confirmation. She had kept a very through record of every instance the dogs had cost the household and planned on settling in small claims court against Kakashi in the next few months if he didn’t own up soon and cough up some dough.

“Yes it has been an experience getting used to the dogs. Always underfoot they are.”

Offering an open space to Kuma, Mebuki settled into one of the two armchairs in the room. Bull hopped into the second. Kizashi hovered awkwardly in the hall and muttered something about getting drinks and retreated to the safety of the kitchen.

Kizashi could play whenever it was needed and so far that had been his entire life, especially since the fall of Uzushio. And sometimes the awkward house-spouse shtick made everything a little easier on his wife.

In the room Kuma got to work laying out the general expectations of a Hatake apprentice, especially for one outside the clan. Mebuki smiled and countered with her own expectations for her daughter.

Truthfully they both wanted, essentially, the same thing. The Hatake needed the skills passed on so that eventually when they produced another ninja someone would be out there to teach them. Mebuki wanted her daughter to be strong enough to survive.

Mebuki saw the writing on the wall after Sakura started coming home from the academy or from training with bloody knuckles and bruises on her shins. Her girl was a fighter and wasn’t going to settle behind a desk pushing papers. (Ironically, Sakura spent a solid third of her days now sitting at desks pushing papers.)

They spent hours going back and forth, negotiating terms, Bull occasionally offering input. No one sent for Kakashi or for Sakura. It wasn’t about them anymore. This was creating the foundation for a much larger enterprise.

The wolf (Kuma confirmed it two hours into a heated debate about traditional vs modern swordsmanship techniques Sakura should be taught) had guessed that the samurai clan was a front from the beginning and had done his research before setting foot in the house.

The Haruno’s were in the business of procuring rare items, so to speak. Some of the best – living in the heart of a shinobi village and getting away with it proved that. And, boy, did they.

In the wake of the Uchiha massacre and abolishment of the military police a power vacuum across the village had formed. In many of the wards and districts, gangs had stepped up controlling their territories with an iron fist. So long as they didn’t interfere with shinobi affairs or village security the administration left them alone. Civilians were civilians and not something to worry overtly about.

Two thirds of the civilian born population relied on the Haruno trade for everything from groceries to drugs (medical and recreational.) The rest of the population for the entire city also benefited off their wares. They just didn’t know it.

If the Haruno’s came down so would Konoha. The village would starve in eight months, the trade would go elsewhere, and the non-com staff the administration relied on without notice or thanks would leave. It was ingenious.
They controlled the wares and trade which, in turn, controlled the gangs. And the gang movements controlled the chunnin patrols. It was an excellent ploy. One the Hatake had been idly watching for a decade now from their compound on the far side of the Nara forest.

“The Hatake were once samurai, you know.” Kuma said idly as Mebuki finalized the contract.

She barely glanced up. “How fortuitous, I am also samurai.”

“But your daughter isn’t.”

“No. And neither are you.”

The woman and the wolf grinned at each other with all their teeth. They understood one another. The Hatake had abandoned any motto when they walked away from their titles and lands over a century ago. If they ever had one, it would be something reminiscent of ‘eat the weak.’ The Haruno would rob you blind then try to sell you your own items at triple the price the next day. It wasn’t the same but mercenaries came from all types of cloth, and one knew how to spot the other.

Mebuki signed her name and using a kitchen knife, all she had on hand, smeared her bloody thumb print underneath.

Kuma, offering a paw for Mebuki to slice, set one giant pawprint across the bottom of the scroll.

Bull overseeing the entire thing sighed quietly. He, too, offered a paw and set it in the only free spot, notarizing the deal as legal and binding. (He’d become a notary out of boredom during the third war. Kakashi had been dead set against using his pack for a few months and nothing said a talking dog couldn’t. Plus, Bull was Inuzuka bred and anything that was offered to one of their ninken automatically was offered to him.)

And so the deal was struck. Even if Kakashi and Sakura wouldn’t know about it until later that night when Bull found them in the training fields – trying to kill each other (Sakura was, Kakashi was avoiding angry fists and trash talking the girl to hell and back).

Sakura had turned up in the quartermaster department with three perfectly filled out forms done in triplicate. She also carried documentation citing every instance of misconduct on behalf of the department (not giving them supplies).

The woman in the weapons cage perked up at the door opening and outright grinned at the kid once she came up to the counter.

“Captain Haruno Sakura right?! I’ve been waiting for you to turn up! You seemed the type. Hold on – hold on I got your stuff right-” the woman huffed out a breath and she hauled a massive milk crate up onto the counter. “Right here!”

Sakura blinked and held out her files not sure what was going on. “Uh… here?”

“Oh sweet, thanks kid! You didn’t have to do that! We track all missions! No paperwork required from you! Anyways we got everything sealed up for you, gonna need those back once you’re done transporting them, sorry.”
The woman reached up and unlocked something that pulled the bars up. She pushed the crate at Sakura. It was filled to the brim with scrolls.

“So you have 24 hours to transport your materials and return the scrolls. If you damage the scrolls in any way the full price will come out of your pay. Sorry its policy. So this includes everything for your entire team. The check list is at the top.” The woman was still smiling.

Unnerved Sakura glanced down at Pakkun who shrugged and mimed for her to just go with it. Sounded like a solid plan.

Smiling back at the woman Sakura reached forwards to tug the crate off the counter. Godfuckshit it was heavy. Taking a breath Sakura straightened up, lift with your knees girl. Balancing the crate carefully across her front Sakura stepped back to test her balance. She stayed tall and the scrolls didn’t even shift. Good.

“Thank you, uh, senpai.” The nameplate on the counter had a giant plastic spider taped across it (they’d been on back order since the first war).

“No problem kid!” The woman flashed a happy thumbs up, then leaned forward to stage whisper “So kid, I got my tickets already but you should know you’re gonna do great in the third stage.”

Sakura beamed at the unexpected support before she could thank the woman, she quickly whispered “If nothing else kick a motherfucker in the balls kid. Don’tcha forget that one.”

Giggling Sakura nodded and left, Pakkun leading the way with one careful glance back at the woman who waved.

Serious again Sakura made her way to Naruto’s apartment (the office) and let herself and Pakkun in. She dumped all the scrolls into the kitchen sink then lit a match careful not to include any chakra.

She dropped it onto the array then leapt backwards into the miniature fort she’d made earlier that day. Nothing exploded though she did hear something die against the exterior wards. It smelled like ink and blood.

Ten minutes later she went to inspect her wares. The sink was a burnt out mess and all of the scrolls had unraveled and unsealed, completely destroyed by the array Danuja-sensei had sold her earlier in the market.

She also threatened to turn Sakura inside out if she didn’t stop by and get that goddamn chakra stealing rug out of her shop.

There was a literal mountain of weapons and other assorted equipment strewn across the kitchen. The requisition forms hadn’t been updated since the second shinobi war and it showed – what team needed a full weapons kit for a D-rank?

Oh yes. This was great. The girl and the dog grinned at each other with all their teeth and got to work.

Chapter End Notes

whattup y'all i started a new job today. anyone else have great news to share?? I'm proud of myself and anyone else who met any sort of little goal recently.
Also the Haruno r 10000000% yakuza they gotta be more chill about it cause uh ninja. Mebuki is a big fan of making a lot of noise about the housing laws and council so that distracts people from the shady deals she does at the weekly district potluck.

the hatake clan.... y'all i looked and looked and theres basically nothing about them which means I GET TO MAKE SHIT UP YES! so i did. back story on the clan and how they differ from the inuzaku coming soon! also i had a hell of a time coming up with Tatakau Yama-Inu. it basically means 'fighting mountain dog' BUT i found a few sources that said yama-inu was slang wayyyy back when in folklores for wolf and i was like +_+ anyways i dont actually speak Japanese so if the name is wrong... let me know. i will cry and then ill fix it

I will be answering comments very slowly! new job! plus uh... my other... three jobs so I'm very busy rn!

NOT A POLL THIS TIME BUT A TEST!!! If anyone can guess what two characters i based Aunt Reiko off of i will write you a one shot of your choice (within reason i got some limits). Heres a hint: both characters are from the same movie. EDIT ok i've had two correct guesses so I'm going to close the test. It was Moro and Okkoto from Princess Mononoke! I loved everyones guesses!!!!

NEXT UP: Konoha Crush. The Third Stage of the Chunnin Exams! Sudden Death!
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ok first thing you need to know is that when Sakura dreamed up this harebrained plan she legitimately thought she was going to die.

Second, the thought of Naruto and Sasuke facing down certain doom was an actual nightmare she once had so she maybe panicked.

(She didn’t just panic Sakura had a full blown melt down before smacking herself to think of a plan.)

And now here she was, Sasuke slung across her shoulders Naruto a few feet behind carrying Pakkun, running for their lives.

Admittedly, acknowledged Sakura, she probably didn’t need to manufacture an explosion quite that large but when you are face to face with a literal demon critical thinking skills fly right out the window.

Anyways our intrepid heroes were running for their lives from a situation almost entirely of their own making. Naruto was hollering for them to run faster and Pakkun was just yelling in general. Sakura wasn’t yelling because she was carrying Sasuke – who also wasn’t yelling because he was unconscious – and it was a little hard to breathe at the moment, thanks.

Not to mention the blast wave that knocked them ass over teakettle mixed in with a spectacular sonic boom.

Sakura really hoped there was at least one competent medic left in Konoha after everything because her eardrums? Toast.

Pakkun was unconscious and Naruto was heaving up chunks near-by. They really needed to get up and keep running but honestly if they hadn’t died just then they probably weren’t going to. Must have put enough distance between themselves and the explosion.

Nope she was wrong they needed to keep moving. She righted herself grabbed Pakkun and kicked Naruto to get him going. He could puke and run. (That entire thing lasted maybe four seconds which was really four seconds too many.)

As they ran Sakura couldn’t actually hear the yowl of a dying monster but the rest of the world sure could.

Maybe Sakura should start at the beginning.

“ALLLLL RIGHT LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! MURDERS AND THOSE OF US WHO HIRE THEM! ARE YOU READY FOR THE ONE AND ONLY KONOHAGAKURE CHUNNIN EXAMINATIONS?!?”

Gross, the pregame tailgaters were out in full form this morning.
Cringing away from the ensuing cheers Sakura was extremely glad for her spiffy new hood. Pink hair was just a tiny bit more memorial then say brown and she’d been stopped twice already on her way to the stadium. Once to listen to frightfully terrible advice and the other to hear how amazing it was there were two whole girls in the finals this year and that Sakura better kick that sand bitch’s ass (their words).

Honestly the odds of Sakura making it to the semi-finals where she would face Temari were slim. The odds of anyone ever reaching the semi’s in the chunnin exams were slim.

Slipping in a side entrance one of the guards grinned and whispered “Sweet threads!” while the other looked over her ID.

As she trotted down the hallways the distinct sound of someone getting thumped echoed behind her.

“Sweet threads? Haha, you sound like my mom holy shit dude.”

“Shaddup. What was I supposed to say? Shit, kid, that funky cape cloak thing is bitchin?”

“Yes!”

Sakura snickered as she put her bitchin cape cloak thing away. Wouldn’t do for anyone to see it before the big reveal. Whenever that was.

Now not many people knew this cause most ninja tended to be the biggest bunch of dramatic assholes, but the stadium had a handy dandy locker room tucked neatly behind the contestants balcony. So far it looked like Sakura was the first one here. She was also possibly going to be the only to actually use the room since no one ever got to the exams early enough to do so.

“Good morning Sakura-san.”

Practically levitating Sakura swore her soul tried to vacate this plane of existence for a second. Spinning around to face Shino, Sakura tried her damnedest not to let her heart stopping fright show. It didn’t work – Shino’s shoulders slumped a little when he realized the girl literally hadn’t noticed him standing in the middle of the room.

“Shino! Heyyyy, what’re, uh, whatcha doing here? So early?” No worries Sakura was great at playing it cool.

All she got for her trouble was a lifted eyebrow - which was inexplicably more impressive with the shades – and a slight head tilt as if Sakura had said something strange.

“I believe that all shinobi should show initiative and drive when seeking a promotion. Don’t you agree? You, too, are here early.”

“Oh of course!” Sakura was here early because of anxiety and nothing else. She also felt a burning need to pull out her own sunglasses but refrained. (Sakura didn’t know this but if she had pulled out those glasses she’d gotten to match Akino a few weeks ago Shino would have been delighted by the matchyness of it all.)

“Well! I’m gonna, uh, go check out the arena!” Spinning around with stiff limbs Sakura tried to hurry out of the room before Shino invited himself along.

“Yes, that is a good idea. I will join you.”
That was a little too far back. How about what happened next?

Eventually everyone else showed up to the stadium. The stands filled beyond capacity and wholly ignoring the fire code – not that anyone ever paid attention to silly civilian shit like that. And the other competitors showed up.

Not Sasuke or Dosu though. The first was late and the second was dead. Which was a bummer ‘cause that meant Sakura didn’t have anyone to fight in the first round. (Actually it was a bonus.)

Anyways Naruto fucking obliterated Neji. Sorta. Kinda. He got his ass whooped in the process and exactly no one walked away from that match thinking either boy was ready for a promotion.

A large portion of it was mid way through the match Neji yelled about how a demon was corrupting Naruto and how he was an idiot for not seeing it. (Everyone who was in the know got really tense for a hot second there and Hiashi sighed ‘cause that was treason and his nephew was about to die.)

Then to everyone’s bafflement he pointed at the competitors balcony. Naruto who had been white as a sheet up until that point put two and two together and started laughing.

“You think- HA – Sak- pfffttt, is a- holy shit- please say that to her face.”

Sakura also put two and two together and leaned over the railing to yell at Neji to come say that to her face you fucking coward.

(It was a relief to know Konoha didn’t have even more high level security breeches at the moment. The raid on the hospital would have gone off without a hitch if only they had fucking found Kabuto. ANBU was quite literally turning over every rock.)

So Naruto got serious and punched Neji’s face in for insulting his friend. Sakura cheering wildly in the background.

And then the puppet boy chickened out of his match with Shino, which was lame. Sakura came prepped and ready to take notes.

Honestly she loved her teammates but the real challenge was going to be Shikamaru and Shino. Maybe that Sand bitch. The redhead didn’t even count because he was fuck off levels of scary. Neji… didn’t even rank.

Ah whatever, Shikamaru’s match had some fun strategy involved and Temari was frightfully strong judging by how hard her fan smacked into the ground a few times. (Sakura made careful note to stay out of dodge.)

It was also the bathroom break match and took forever to get through. So by the time anything actually happened Sakura was the only one really paying attention. (So was Shino but no one could tell.)
Meanwhile in the stands Ino had found Choji and was animated in her cheering for her lazy teammate. Maybe a little too animated but who cared?! Shikamaru was gonna kick that bitch’s ass! Whoo!

Actually, a girl a row ahead of Team 10 turned around to peer up at the yelling blond. Ino grinned down at her and her cute little buns and flashed a peace sign ready to recruit a fellow baby genin into yelling their peers into victory when she recognized the other girl.

“Hey! Hey I know you! You’re, uh, Ten... Tenten! I’m Yamanaka Ino! Nice to meetcha!”

“Uh, hey.” Tenten wasn’t sure what to do with this and slowly turned back around to face front again. Maybe if she didn’t make eye contact the clan princess would forget she was here.

All of a sudden there where two faces way to close for comfort and this Yamanaka Ino girl was grinning right in Tenten’s face.

“You here to see that bitch get got? Its gonna be great! And even if our boy Shikamaru loses – impossible – she’ll totally get her ass handed to her by Sakura!”

Tenten was, in fact, here to see the bitch get got but that didn’t mean she wanted other people to see her little victories. It was why she purposely chose a part of the stands where she didn’t recognize people. Ugh.

“I dunno Ino. I still think Shika’s gonna forfeit.” The large boy leaning over the back of the seat to Tenten’s left was saying.

Which was… irritating. Unable to help herself Tenten turned to the boy, speaking over the blond.

“Why would he forfeit. Its, its dishonorable!” Tenten couldn’t even compute how, how fucking ungrateful that kid would be if he quite. The fucking Nara heir was a shoe in for promotion and everyone knew it. If he just quit. That would. That. Words failed Tenten.

“Pshyeah right, if that lazyass quits he’ll have me to deal with!” Ino shook her fist, the fire of a thousand thousand burning suns of rage in her eyes. Enthralled Tenten nodded at the girl.

“I’ll help.”

Blinking back at Tenten, Ino grinned brightly.

“Why don’t you move back here to sit with me and Choji? It’s way more fun to trashtalk in a group!”

Twisting Tenten eyed the empty seat and the boy – he waved and offered her a chip. Sold she scrambled over the back and settled in, Akimichi Choji introducing himself in the meanwhile.

Once she was comfortable Ino slanted her eyes sideways at the other girl. Choji shuffled his chip bags around because he knew that look and didn’t want to get pulled into whatever this was going to be.

“So... Soooo… You hang around with Team 7 a lot right? Whatcha think of Sakura’s new look?”

Tenten slanted her own eyes sideways at the blond. She could smell an angle a mile away but she’d go with it for now.
“Oh yeah all the time. I helped Sakura train a little for this! And it looks badass!”

“Right! Where do you think she got it made? It’s gotta be expensive! All that fur!” Instant friends Ino was.

“I think the fur came from that bear I heard she killed in the Forest.” Tenten wasn’t instant friends but it was super close.

“Wait- wait, you mean?” There were some vague gestures.

“Oh yeah.” Even more gestures in return.

“Well damn. Sakura all grown up. I’m so proud.”

As Ino pretended to wipe a fake tear Choji leaned into Tenten’s space to whisper “Don’t listen to Ino, she’s been saying that all month since she almost got blown up.”

That had Tenten sniggering into her hand as Ino rounded on the boy. Suddenly cutting through the noise a bright voice yelled out.

“DID I MISS IT?! DID MY RIVAL WIN?!”

The three kids twisted to peer at the bowl cut in scrubs.

“Lee! No! Sakura hasn’t gotten to fight yet! Come here you have to meet Ino and Choji!”

Across the way Haruno Mebuki leaned back, conspicuously hidden behind the huge mound of fur that was Kuma. The wolf was clearly enjoying himself watching the long match below but Mebuki was having an even better time watching Sakura’s friends meet each other.

They were just too cute!

Oh, it made her so sad when Sakura declared Ino her ‘love rival’ (whatever that was) because the other girl stopped coming around. And then Sakura thought she was super sneaky keeping her little team away.

Just you wait babygirl Mama was gonna meet those two adorable little boys. It was coming.

Kakashi could take a long walk off a short deck and conveniently forget how to use chakra.

Wait, no she couldn’t think badly of the man now. He was Mebuki’s precious daughter’s master. Or something. Mebuki wasn’t exactly sure about Hatake Kakashi’s qualifications but she did have an iron clad contract that stated if anything happened to the original master another would be found within the clan. And Mebuki had made damn sure there was someone else available before she signed her name.

Mebuki had also heard talk around town that Sakura’s team had taken up with another genin squad and it was her girl that was leading them! Oh, she was so proud! And to top that off there where some interesting rumors about a genin squad discovering paperwork. The goddamn military industrial complex wouldn’t know what hit it once Sakura got a little older.
Mebuki had made damn sure of that. It made her grin with the strength of a woman who could topple countries with the correct whisper. And since Mebuki could… well.

Kuma meanwhile was busy leaning forward utterly entrapped with the byplay of the number one most boring match of the tournament.

(A couple of spectators who recognized Haruno Mebuki edged away at the force of her grin wondering if she had rigged the matches… Never mind the enormous nin animal she’d probably hired next to her.)

“Hey Shino,” Sakura bored out of her mind felt the need to answer a not at all pressing question. She wasn’t exactly sure if Shino was paying attention to her or not but she got the vague feeling he was so she continued.

“You know the jackets and glasses shhtick your clan has? Is it copyrighted? Or patented or something?” She turned her face out of her folded arms. Leaning on the railing meant you got to see all of the action (none of the action – neither idiot in the ring had moved for 15 minutes).

“Our presentation is not exactly trademarked no, but it is something that all Aburame take pride in perfecting to match each of our unique personalities while remaining obviously a part of the clan. Why are you looking to steal another look beyond Tobirama-sama’s?”

Who the fuck knew Shino could be a petty bastard? Sakura kinda dug it, it was exactly like finding out the shy kid could and would deck you in the empty lot behind school at 2am on a Tuesday.

“Hey, hey Sakura-chan! Who’s this Tobirama dude? I betcha your new fur vest thing is way cooler then some lame asshole no ones heard of!” Trust in Naruto to butt in when he wasn’t needed.

“Thanks Naruto, and Shino it’s inspired by the second Hokage I’m clearly not copying him! First of all, his was made out of fox fur! This is bear! And second I have way more then he did!” Sakura struck a pose to make sure the two boys could fully appreciate her new look – also this fur was brown not white come on assholes use your brains.

And it sure was a Look.

Danuja-sensei had outdone herself (Sakura assumed – she hadn’t gotten the chance to see many examples of the woman’s work so maybe this wasn’t the best she could do…). Sakura was now the proud owner of many many bearskin items. Who knew that an eighteen-foot monster bear could produce not only a full bedroll but a cloak, a sweet fur collar to accessorize her nifty lost ‘n found vest, and an entirely separate cloak that included the head?

Kakashi had nixed her plan to wear that on the grounds that Sakura was so small the thing didn’t fit and she wouldn’t actually be able to see out of it. So that was sitting at home in her closet waiting for the day Sakura was finally big enough.

It was ok though she could get by with her sweet fur collar and cleverly hidden regular boring cloak until then. (It was rolled up into a seal just at the base of her collar. And it wasn’t boring it was badass. As fuck. Like 100% Sakura had the best outfit of the exams. She was winning already.)
Also, pro-tip, if you aren’t used to wearing fur it is extremely itchy the first couple of times. Even heavily treated and stylized fur. Just. Sakura swore she smacked her own face at least 10 times the first time she wore it during training.

Kakashi was a bit of a weirdo but he did have a point about making sure that if you modify your outfit you should be aware of how it moved and if you can actually fight in it.

Shino was giving her new look a long gander. Sakura tried not to obviously preen.

“My apologies, you are correct. It is not an exact replica of Lord Second. It it was, there would be more armor.”

“What! Hey you jerkface take that back! Sakura-chan’s got plenty of ar-urk.”

Clotheslining Naruto wasn’t the nicest thing to do but she couldn’t have him spilling any of her trade secrets before her match.

“Hush you. And Shino,” she paused to smile at bug boy, “you should know that armor isn’t always obvious.”

Who needed Naruto to spill trade secrets when Sakura turned around and did it all on her own?

Cringing she dragged Naruto to the other side of the balcony.

“Think Sasuke-kun is gonna show up in time for his match?”

“That loser? Pshh – probably. He’d try and rip Kaka-sensei’s fingers off or something ya know?”

Snorting Sakura let her eyes trail across the stands – as far as she could see at least. It was going to be awesome showing off how far she’d come. Hopefully it would be impressive enough to garner a promotion. Though gaining some sort of reputation out of this mess would be nice.

Although she’d heard something about a picture of her and the bear? Maybe her dramatic revel of her bear skin cloak wouldn’t be a surprise…

Maybe if she – oh no. Oh no no no no.

Sakura eyes’s caught on something familiar. Exceedingly familiar. Someone she’d seen this morning that swore up and down about not coming to the match.

Frozen in horror Sakura could feel her palms start to sweat from nerves. She went to wipe her hands off then thought better of it. Clenching her fists and carefully folding her arms so her hands were hidden up in her armpits.

“My mom is here.” She whispered to Naruto.

And Naruto – who had never met Sakura’s mom – whipped around to scan the stadium like he could spontaneously pick the anonymous woman out of a crowd numbering easily in the thousands.

“What that’s great! Do ya think she saw me fight?! I wanna meet her!”

Sakura didn’t respond, too busy sinking down into her nifty fur collar to hide the flush spreading as Mebuki noticed her daughters stare across the stadium and leapt up to wave and gesture towards… yep. That was Ino. And Tenten. And Choji. And Lee.

Kill me now, thought Sakura who would rather do literally anything else then fight in front of her
mother. Maybe she’d get called away on urgent business before the second round and Sakura wouldn’t have to fight knowing the most judgmental eyes in all the elemental countries was watching.

That’d be superduper. Hahaha ha h a.

“Match!”
“Shit I missed it – how?!?”
“Temari wins!”
“Wait that Nara had her dead to rights – what!”

Asuma snickered as the crowd yelled in outrage. Next to him Kurenai sighed deeply and with feeling.

“I told you – zero motivation what so ever.”

They sat in shared silence as down below the officials (haha Genma was such a dope getting suckered into babysitting the chunnin hopefuls) decided what to do about Sasuke and his no show. Abruptly Genma perked up and gestured to the Kage booth.

There was a little back and forth before Genma addressed the crowd.

“It has been decided that Aburame Shino and Haruno Sakura will fight the next match!”

Kurenai sighed again, deeper and with more feeling. Asuma lit up next to her.

They watched as the two kids descended into the arena.

“Oh Ko-Taicho the hospital is closed today so don’t get yourself hurt again!”

Genma laughed as he heckled the pink one just a smidge before it was back to business.

The kiddo’s seemed to be talking to one another (and ignoring Genma) but without chakra amplification it was near impossible to hear what they were saying. Whatever it was, it sure had Genma grinning as he watched the two clasp hands.

The match started.

“Hey Kurenai,” whispered a sketchy dude with a sketchy bundle the row behind the two jounin.

Twisting Asuma and Kurenai blinked at Kakashi and his previously missing student.

“You teach that Inuzuka kid right?” Continued Kakashi as if this wasn’t weird enough.

“Yeah- what, Kakashi our students are fighting can’t this wait?” Kurenai caught Asuma’s eye silently asking if he knew what was up. The smoker shrugged.

And while all the jounin had their backs turned the crowd suddenly roared in approval. Whipping back around they caught the tail end of Sakura leaping through the air, a wild grin on her face as she
twisted the edge of her collar to pull down a, a cloak.

That didn’t warrant a wild crowd did it?

It was Kakashi’s turn to sigh deeply and with feeling.

No one turned to ask him if he was ok or to clear up his weird questions, apparently shit was going down in the arena and they missed it!

The girl landed tossed her head back the cape fluttering impressively before the arena lit up with one hell of a light show.

“Kakashi.”

“Yep.”

“You did not teach her the chidori.”

“Nope.”

“That sure looks like it.”

“Well. It isn’t.”

“Kakashi if your student kills mine I will gut you.”

“Yep.”

(“I only showed her once.” Mumbled the weird preteen shaped blanket next to Kakashi.)

For the record it was not, in fact, the chidori. It wasn’t even close. What it was, was… well ok it was technically (not really at all) a modified chidori but Sakura did not have the chakra reserves for even one of those suckers. Nor had Kakashi actually taught it to her. (Sasuke had been throwing a fit and Kakashi had mixed up their training times so the two overlapped then hadn’t even shown up. Sakura asked Sasuke to show her the problem and like a fool he did. Sakura couldn’t produce a chidori but that didn’t stop her from modifying it into an electrical surge.)

Her element wasn’t even lightning! Or fire which would have helped!

Sakura was earth and water. Which meant that she shouldn’t be able to do this. But with excellent chakra control came many many techniques no genin should have any business learning. Or modifying. (It wasn’t even close to chidori the lightning was nearly entirely flash with no substance it would feel no worse then an electric fence to the touch. Just enough to fry a fly.)

Sakura knew her strengths and liked to play by the book. Which meant she sat down and thought long and hard about all the various opponents she would face and came up with a basic game plan for each one. And then a plan B – E incase they didn’t work.

This was Plan Bug Spay. Which admittedly wasn’t a great name but Sakura wasn’t focused on the naming aspect so much as the details.
And she was already off book. Which would hopefully help.

Step one had been chat with Shino before the match began – offer him a great fight as a fellow leaf and shake hands. While shaking hands plant a miniature explosive seal on the sleeve of his massive coat.

Step two was fight some. Leave that open for interpretation.

Step three ditch the bugs Shino totally planted on her when they shook hands.

Four was boom.

(Four was always going to be boom Sakura decided.)

But now Sakura didn’t think it would get that far at all. She liked the open air of steps two and three honestly. It allowed some misdirection. The cloak set the tone and the lightning finished it off while neatly frying every single creepy crawly trying to syphon any spare chakra.

Between the flickers Sakura grinned at Shino who was wide eyed and a little sweaty.

The lights died and Shino shifted his weight to counter his loss. Instead of attacking the boy staggered and brought his right hand to cover his mouth, all color draining away from what little skin visible.

Hardly believing her luck Sakura quickly brought her own hands up in the rat seal.

Release just a breath away when Genma hurriedly called the match.

Grinning Sakura trotted over and peeled her explosive away from the boy – far to close to Shino’s head for comfort. Ok so the fight was lackluster at best, not super exciting at worst but honestly? It was fucking textbook.

And no one could argue against that.

Too bad Sakura didn’t get to really show off her new jutsu or anything – she’d been perfecting a mud wall recently and it was going fantastic but against an Aburame sometimes it wasn’t physically prowess that won you the fight. Knocking one of them out did absolute fuck all if you didn’t get rid of the bugs first.

The medics that rushed across the arena quietly demanded what she had used.

A quick discussion and Sakura returned to the competitors balcony.

Naruto looked suspicious. Mulling over the whole fight trying to pinpoint what exactly wasn’t sitting right with him.

“Oi Sakura-chan… that… wasn’t very nice. What’d ya do to Shino anyways? An’ I thought that was gonna be more uh, clober’n or someth’n?”

Flashing a v for victory Sakura grinned at the boy ignoring the interested hopefuls clearly eavesdropping.

“We’re shinobi, dummy, we don’t have to fight fair. The best ninja never do.”

(In the stands Ino, suspicious, ran over everything that happened then did a quick survey of the crowd. Auntie Mebuki waved at her. Ohooo Sakura got nervous! That’s why she got Shino to shake
Back to waiting for Sasuke to show up the stadium settled in for a long 10-minute wait. Filled with booing and trash throwing. Truly nothing brought people together like yelling at the ref for something they had no control over

Naruto eyeballing his teammate edged across the balcony to Shikamaru who probably shoulda left by now since he lost and all.

“Psstt. Shikamaru. Hey. I know you’re awake. What’d Sakura-chan do??”

And Shikamaru who valued living over dying at the hands of a pre-teen girl he’d known adjacently since he was six shrugged and made a ‘dunno’ noise.

Unfazed Naruto started poking the Nara in the ribs, repeatedly, fully intending on annoying the answer out of the boy.

“Come on ya gotta know. Tell me- tell me- tell me- tell me- tell- uh…”

Blinking open one eye Shikamaru got an uncomfortable close up with that Gaara guy’s elbow as he used his sand to physically hold Naruto’s finger in place.

No one said anything and Gaara, apparently satisfied and on a totally different wavelength then the other day, walked off.

Naruto was glowering after the psycho and clearly gearing up to start yelling judging by the puffiness of his cheeks. Swiftly Shikamaru reached out and grabbed Naruto by the arm and bodily dragged him into the hallway. And then down two flights of stairs incase the idiot started yelling.

Deciding that this random floor was better then all the other random floors Shikamaru plunked down on the steps and sighed leaning back on his elbows.

“She poisoned him.”

Naruto flopped down.

“Uhhhh no? She never even cut him?”

Rolling his eyes Shikamaru snorted a little. “You don’t need to cut someone to poison them. They could eat it, breath it, touch it…. Eating means they could also drink it FYI.”

“Oi! I know that! ‘M not stupid!” Crossing his arms, the blond huffed slightly outraged and majorly confused because as far as he could tell Sakura hadn’t managed to pull off any of that either.

“Its in her lotion. Ino uses the same one… Its not usually potent enough to do anything to people but sweat compounds the effects.”

Shikamaru had puked his guts up the fourth day of training with Team 10 because he hadn’t tried at all during a sparing match and Ino had rubbed her gross hands all over his face. He’d thought she was just being childish. Now he was firmly on team ‘dodge at all costs and get some booster shots
STAT.’ (Hint: getting yourself immune to a poison compound sold only in a specific lotion did wonders for your callouses.)

Squinting Naruto opened his mouth to ask something else when the crowd went nuts outside. Sharing a glance both boys ran off to find a window to see if Sasuke had shown up yet.

On the way there both boys caught the tail end of Gaara mindlessly killing some grass shinobi and as one turned right back around and ran the other way.

“Should… we tell your teacher?”

“Wha- why him- nO WE NEED TO TELL SAKURA-CHAN!”

The world went to hell with a lullaby.

(Just to make sure the record is clear here; ANBU did actually perform a wholesale raid on the hospital and associated suspect medical facilities. And while they caught a number of shady people doing shady things and even had one casualty while taking a nurse into custody (who, in retaliation for that casualty, was now a bloodstain in a hall of the pediatric ward) they had not, in fact, managed to nab Yakushi Kabuto.

Yamanaka Inoichi was not happy which meant no one was happy. The man literally radiated his moods like the flu and they were catching everywhere he went storming through holding cells catching passing thoughts left and right with a glance. Which meant when the alert came from the arena he gnashed his teeth in more anger then perhaps he should have gone into a fight with. It was fine though because it just meant the rest of the black ops was ready to beat some ass right out the gate.)

The stadium was filled past capacity with civilians which meant that once the genjutsu dropped all those people became prominent obvious liabilities. Not only were the leaf ninja fighting invaders they literally had to protect unconscious limp bodies from becoming dead limp bodies.

It really sucked and Kakashi was not amused. Firstly, his day started super early so he could kidnap Sasuke and try to convince the brat to forfeit then he had to sit through Sakura’s match where she did whatever the fuck that was to win and then watch Sasuke run around like an idiot and not actually stick to the plan at all?!?

 Fucking figures. The only one of those three idiots to even have a plan had so fucking many Kakashi forgot most of them. He also hadn’t listened to hard when Sakura brainstormed in Kakashi’s general direction a week or so ago.

But noooo now Sasuke had somehow, somewhere gotten it into his head that he wanted to be a medic and followed Sakura along to the hospital practically every day, which seriously cut into training. Naruto tagged along but that was more hilarious then anything. So here Kakashi was just trying to get a handle on the fucking clusterfuck of a team (maybe it was Kakashi that was the fucking clusterfuck…) and apparently save the fucking world from. Uh. Bad guys.

Taking a second to pause Kakashi squinted at a couple of headbands. Sound and Sand. Right ok that explained them grabbing that Gaara kid and running earlier.
That Sasuke… ran after.

Fuck. Mannnn seriously? Kakashi was going to kill Genma later, why the hell did Hayate have to go and fucking die and leave this idiot to proctor the exams??

(Hayate was not dead. He was hidden behind four layers of concealment seals six stories underground and currently had no idea what was going on in the outside world. That Haruno’s intel had come in just in time for ANBU to stage a minor sting meant there was now a body with Hayate’s face six feet under.)

He turned to go find what was left of his dumb team just in time to see Sakura scale the opposite side of the stadium and take off after Sasuke. Naruto and Nara Shikamaru in tow. Huffing Kakashi went about summoning Pakkun to send the dog after them for back up.

“Shit you better get the rest of the pack up here soon its gonna be a blood bath.” Advised Pakkun, which was unnerving but whatever Kakashi could handle it.

Hesitating, Kakashi reached out and grabbed an awake Konoha genin slinking through the stands that Kakashi kinda recognized.

“Hey kid you know Sakura?” There was a disbelieving nod – wow talk about silent sass. “Good go with Pakkun and back up her and her team – A rank I’ll make sure you get paid.”

Singular eye and shaded eyes held one another for a moment before the kid nodded again. Nodding back Kakashi let the kid go and sent the two on their way.

As Kakashi went back into the thick of it a howl came up from somewhere near by. It made Kakashi’s skin crawl and every shinobi in the immediate area freeze for a fraction of a second. A second howl joined in, then a third far off distant cry.

Now small fact wolves have got this crazy harmonization going on that’s better then any acapella group out there. And three normal wolves could sound like ten. Three chakra enhanced wolves could sound like 50 and as if they had walked out of your worst nightmare.

For Kakashi who could understand them (and coulda, ya know, joined in if he wasn’t a pussy) it was like leaping into the ocean off the Land of Snow’s coast stark naked and then finding yourself in the middle of a scorching desert still stark naked under the burning sun. Basically damn awful. That feeling of your nail catching on the wrong kind of metal lip. Bad texture. But sound.

Twisting his head around slowly (and absently slitting the throat of a Sand nin) Kakashi got an eyeful of his second cousin literally ripping someone’s guts out with his teeth.

Kuma glanced up and the two made eye contact.

Kakashi twisted back to his side of the stadium and tried not to let himself think about the toothy wolf smirk directed at his back. Shuffling off, as much as an elite shinobi currently killing people could shuffle, Kakashi headed back in the direction of Gai and the other jounin because the alternative was teaming up with family and, honestly, Kakashi would rather die first.

“AH MY COOL AND HIP RIVAL! I HAVE SLAIN FORTY-SIX OF THESE VILLIANS – BY MY COUNT I AM WINNING OUR CONTEST!”

“Hm? Are you sure?”
So ok, Sakura was trying *really* hard not to panic. Naruto and Shikamaru had sped onto the competitors balcony spewing something about someone killing people and then Sasuke tried to use some medic knife thing (Sakura absolutely refused to call that a chakra scalpel. It was like a chakra clever and it wasn’t even sharp. Damnit Sasuke get your head out of your ass and fuckin win!) then the whole *whatever* started going down and Sasuke ran after the freaky monster boy.

She loved him (maybe not romantically? Blasphemy she knew but there was only so many times you could literally hear someone yell about manga tropes before you just kinda went ugh really? really this? This is what you want to love? There’s more important things guys) but the boy was a damn fool.

The stands were going nuts something was going down there was a lot of blood and Sasuke was a fucking idiot and everyone was asleep so Sakura had to do what Sakura had to do. She would have gone after him all on her own but Naruto and Shikamaru were literally right there and the first rule of the Academy was don’t go it alone.

(The first rule of the Academy was ’Do As Sensei Says Or Else.’)

She maybe tapped Naruto out of the genjutsu but she definitely kicked Shikamaru. The ass.

And so that was that. Except as Sakura went to leap over the railing she suddenly remembered her mom. Her civilian mom. (Samurai heir mom.) (Yakuza mom.) Oh no her mom was in the stands. Her head whipped in the general direction just in time to see a giant *something* rip the head off an enemy (seriously it was probably Sand but like who else was an enemy and why hadn’t they been attacked yet anyways) nin about to stab a snoozing Mebuki.

*Ok maybe Mom would be the most fine,* thought Sakura who got back on task and took off, boys following suit.

“Ugh what a drag.” mumbled Shikamaru gingerly rubbing his ribs as they ran. This seriously sucked balls. Why the fuck would anyone want to invade Konoha anyways it was just bad planning...

The Nara would have rolled his eyes at himself for the thought if he wasn’t busy trying to keep up with team fuck off. There were so many reasons people would attack. So many in fact it was impossible to know why without some solid info. Which, as a genin running through the woods, Shikamaru did not have. Oh wait…

“Hey uh how are we suppose to… find Sasuke?”

The three came to a stop. That was a good question. Between them not a single kid was a tracker. Well ok they had the basics but that meant shit for anything that used chakra.

Hissing through her teeth Sakura said “We shoulda gone to Kaka-sensei and gotten Pakkun.”

“Ohhhh yeah Sakura-chan that woulda been smart! Too late now though!” Naruto tried to grin but it was a little wobbly.

There was a moment of silence. Sakura chewed on her thumb nail while Shikamaru put his hands together, both of them taking the time to think. Naruto crossed his arms and put on his thinking face.

“Yo.”
Near leaping out of their skin the three whipped around to come face to face with a dog. (And a Shino who slumped when no one noticed him.)

“Hear you might need a tracker.”

Dazed Shikamaru watched as Sakura squealed and swept the dog up while Naruto hopped around them (and almost into Shino “Hey dude you lived!”) chattering a mile a minute.

“Holy shit that dog talks.”

They get pursued because no one has luck that good and the debate of who gets to go die ends with Shikamaru sighing heavily and fading into a shadow. He’s… not the only one who would survive this fight.

But he was the one who wasn’t absolutely necessary to catching up to (saving?) Sasuke. Neither was Shino but well. Shikamaru had dealt with that lotion before and the kid might be running around but he had to be woozy. Giving him more time to get his wits about was only polite.

Plus, Sakura had grabbed his shoulder and stared him in the eye and said Very Seriously “If you live I will do Team 10’s paperwork for a month.”

And who could say no to that?

It goes as well as you might have hoped. Shikamaru doesn’t die but Asuma does have to save his ass so like. Whatever.

Shikamaru wouldn’t know about this until later but having Sakura do the paperwork would be like a minor act of god for the team. And like an act of god; it wasn’t always a good thing.

Sakura tried to make the same offer to Shino but he held up a hand and said “I think I will hold onto a favor from you instead. Because I am… aware of your reputation and intend to make use of it.”

And then went off to fight the puppeteer while Naruto and Pakkun wrestled Sasuke into a bush.

Oh yeah. They’d found Sasuke. About to square off with paintface and not a single Gaara or Sand Bitch in sight.

Dropping down to a team huddle hopefully out of range of the fight happening not to far away Sakura hastily slapped hands over the boys mouths.

“Shutup we gotta decide something real fast. Sasuke why did you chase Gaara? The match is over something is going on, an invasion! This is serious guys!”

“I-” Sasuke started only to be cut off.

“Yeah asshole! We’re a team!! You shoulda at least found Sakura-chan!”

“No I-” He tried again.

“Seriously Sasuke what were you thinking?”
“Holy shit shut it!” Fucking finally.

The bright hair brigade shut up. Pakkun didn’t and pointedly cut Sasuke off. “Did a superior officer order the pursuit?”

Scowling and silent Sasuke nodded.

“Was it Genma? It probably was… did he say anything in particular about it?”

There was a moment before Sasuke realized he wasn’t about to be interrupted. “Uh… to stop them before they released it.”

A paw wave prompted a sigh.

“I don’t know what it is. Maybe something to do with Gaara?”

Pakkun looked worried which in turn set of alarms in each of the kids brains. Non more so then Sakura who honestly was willing to bet that whatever it was, was something earth shatteringly terrible. Like aliens and magic and a crazy god or something terrible. (Sakura really shouldn’t read speculative fiction before bed it makes her crazy.)

“The kid’s a jinchūriki.”

There was a ringing silence other then the fight. Naruto dropped a fist into his other palm mouth dropping into a silent O.

“Wait wait, I know this word! Its uh, uh, a thing! You know like uh…” He squinted really hard for a second apparently struggling with whatever it was he was trying to say. “Like, like those dolls! With the littler dolls inside ‘em! But a demon!”

Naruto nodded proud of himself. There he’d adequately explained it without giving away the pooch.


Sakura was busy chewing on her thumbnail again. Ok so it wasn’t a crazy alien bad but demons were not good. At least there were different kinds of demons! Maybe they’d get lucky and it would just be, like, a tiny one. That ate left socks and puked up nasty things in air vents.

Pakkun nodded and held out a paw for Naruto to touch. “Yeah possibly the Ichibi since its Sand…”

Fuckkkk that was not a little pukey sock stealing demon. That was literally a tailed beast. Admittedly the smallest but A FUCKING TAILED BEAST!

“What.” Sasuke whisper yelled somehow still sounding incredibly flat.

Oh fuck they were going to fight a demon. They had to fight a fucking demon. There was a demon about to be released into Konoha and team dumbass had to go fight it. Oh no oh no oh no, Sakura was not ready, she hadn’t signed up for this, she wanted to go home and take a nap and never think about this again.

They needed a plan. A big plan. For a big demon. Something that was big. Something that was big and could take out a demon. A big demon. A tailed beast. Somethi- oh yeah that could work.

Clapping her hands together Sakura looked up at her team. Sasuke had Naruto in a headlock while the blond gnawed on the Uchiha’s wrist trying to break free. Pakkun was snickering. Both froze and looked at the girl.
“I have a plan. Naruto, you know the gorge to the west?”

“Uhhh sure. But incase I don’t why doncha tell me?”

Rolling his eyes Sasuke interrupted with “She means that cliff Jiraiya pushed you into.”

“Oh yeah I know it.”

What Jiraiya did what. Putting a pin in that for later Sakura nodded.

“Ok Naruto I need you to lead Gaara there. And this is important, listen to me Naruto. Do not go into the gorge. We need Gaara to go in but if you do you will die. Do you understand?”

Both boys were visibly leaning away from the serious girl. Sakura considered for a second then lunged forward to grab Naruto by the shoulders.

“Listen to me Naruto. You cannot go down there. You will die. I don’t know if Gaara will, but this should be some serious stoppage either way. You need to lure Gaara there and then run as hard and as fast as you can in the opposite direction. Do you understand me?!”

“Yeah, Yeah! Get Gaara there, don’t go in, run away. Wait how far to I have to run?”

“Do not stop running Naruto. Possibly meet up with us, actually take Pakkun with you he’s in charge.”

Pakkun watching the back n forth trying to puzzle out the girl’s plan started at that one. “Uh wait a second kiddo. That’s a bad idea, lookit me I’m not exactly built for combat.”

Sakura, letting go of Naruto turned to the dog apologetic.

“I know but I don’t think you can help me and Sasuke, and Naruto needs someone responsible.”

“I what now?” No one responded and Naruto didn’t exactly expect one because it was true.

Pakkun sighed heavily and with feeling, truly the only one to sigh like that today who deserved it.

Sasuke, raised a hand like he was in class then slapped it back down again because he was a genin and not in class and why the fuck did Sakura make him feel like he was sometimes(?!), also trying to work out Sakura’s plan slowly asked “Wait so what’re we doing?”

Haruno Sakura, age twelve, genin, captain of Team 7 clenched her jaw for a moment before relaxing it.

“We’re gonna make a hydrogen bomb.”

(“Hey Sasuke what’s a, uh, a hydrogen bomb?” a shrug “…Dunno…”)

Ok so this, *this* is where our story really starts to take off. See Sakura was a nerd. Its not secret. She thrived in the academy because the girl could read and perform rote memorization like nobody’s business. The fact she could also read and learn and apply those same formulas’ or techniques in real life applications meant she was destined for something.
Not using a calculator for basic math perhaps. Or not killing herself with fumes by mixing the wrong cleaning solutions.

What the academy did not expect was for Sakura to graduate and use her beautiful handwriting and ability to really truly become a teacher’s pet and do every single bit of extra credit to become a thriving team captain. (They also didn’t know.

They did not account for the dog that happily paved the way and gave the correct amount of positive feedback for the girl to appreciate her own inborn talent and eventually recognize herself as something dangerous.

Honestly the academy thought Sakura was gonna die like six months into it.

Jokes on them, she might die five months in. And instead of by an enemy it might be her own hand doing it.

So hauling ass to the gross ass gorge, that apparently one of the Sannin (Sakura was going to find him and throw his stupid ass into a gorge) threw Naruto into, was a really shitty thing to have to manage.

(Before they vacated the immediate area of the fight Sakura yelled at Shino to not follow. The boy had nodded with his very cool shades and Sakura, yet again, had to resist the urge to pull out her own shades to nod back.)

Finding a way to the bottom was rough but doable.

Sakura had been running across the laundry lines of the Uzushio district since she was in diapers this was nothing compared to that. (Actually… they just used some fancy chakra wire and rappelled down.)

At the base of the cliffs it was very dark. And very wet.

A shallow creek gurgled its way through the shadows. Sakura grinned at it before she turned and ran along until she found the fairly large feeding pond.

Sasuke glowered at his damp toes and tried not to scowl at Sakura who managed to stay completely dry. Fucking chakra control…

He didn’t want to interrupt Sakura as she surveyed the area but, honestly, he had no idea how they were going to make this work. At all. A hurried explanation of the volatile nature of hydrogen gas and the order to not make the wrong type of sparks was all he got on the run.

Which was stupid if they were building a giant bomb or whatever Sasuke deserved to know a little more then that. Not that Sakura was talking.

Whatever Sasuke wouldn’t make her, Sakura would probably deck him or something if he broke her concentration.

Sakura was very aware that Sasuke was just itching to ask and silently sent her thanks to the boy for not interrupting her as she thought.

Ninja did not… resort to chemistry when making things happen. They went for chakra and seals and brute force. Or well… that was a lie, ninja sure did like their poisons but explosions and the like? Unless they had time for meticulous planning it simply wasn’t done if you could muscle through with a couple of explosive tags and paper bombs.
Sakura knew very little about the Iwa Explosion Corps other then they existed, but if she had, she
would have eaten those thoughts. And then possibly run off for an apprenticeship that promised to be
far more explosive then her current situation.)

Sakura eyeballed the distance from one cliff face to the other about twenty feet above their heads. It
looked too wide… squinting she adjusted to about thirteen feet up.

The widening of the space seemed fairly uniform and not that far off from the basin… taking
carefully measured steps the girl walked one side to the other keeping count on swinging fingers.
One, two, three, four, that’s 12 feet, one two three four, that’s 24 feet… and so on. Sixty-four feet
across give or take two feet…. She could make that work. She would make that work.

She jogged back to the middle and waved Sasuke over.

“Ok, ok we got this. Do you know what electrolysis is?”

A headshake. How the fuck would Sasuke know shit about electro-whatsit, he only just learned
about the fucking chidori a week ago.

Sakura went to chew on her thumbnail then remembered she’d bitten it to the quick. She gnawed on
the skin surrounding the nail instead.

“Its- wait no, its not important. Sasuke you need to make a charge. Like basically the chidori, sorta,
but it needs to be sustained and even…. Like uh…. Between both hands. Hold the charge between
both hands with them this far apart.”

Sakura held up hers to demonstrate.

Sasuke held up his own to make sure he had that right then hesitated because sure he could make
a chidori but he just threw chakra at it and made it happen. He didn’t know how to… do anything else
with it.

Rolling her eyes Sakura said “You know when you make the lightning and right before you can see
it you feel that tingle? Do that. And don’t stop till I tell you to.”

Oh yeah Sasuke could do that. He nodded and went to speak only to stop at the girls next words.

“With your hands underwater.”

Oh wait no Sasuke might not be able to do that.

“Sakura what the fuck? Wait- is it poison? What happens if I breath it in- I don’t have a gas mask.”

“I have one if you want? Its not really poison but try not to breathe it.” Sakura had the full kit ‘n
caboodle in her pouches, pockets, and fur. She could outfit a full assault squad if she wanted to.

Sasuke looked apprehensive at that ,so Sakura shrugged and handed over the mask. It made him look
gruesome, a remnant of the second war. Probably when the mask was made truth be told. …It was
probably useless.

Grinning Sakura slapped Sasuke on the shoulder (you know what? Sakura was really getting the
hang of this captain thing, look at her being all supportive of her teammates.) and took off full run at
the cliff to physically propel herself up the side.

“And NO SPARKS!” she added over her shoulder.
Ok there have been better plans but no way am I gonna tell Sasuke this is all riding on him…

So this wasn’t exactly the first way of building an explosion possibly big enough to face down a biju. Sakura came up with but it was the only one she could think of that was possible to execute in the time frame. They weren’t exactly making a hydrogen bomb, that would be something else entirely and sure Sakura could probably get her hands on the right materials if her uncle helped out but that would be, well, it would be bad.

So instead she was building a truly massive gas explosion. With the hopes that if she ignites it correctly and direct the blast just so it may just cause a flash boil of the pond and stream adding an unpressurized steam explosion just for funzies. And hopefully monster death.

But who the fuck knows. Sakura had only ever day dreamed about making something like this and never under the pressure of fighting off a fucking demon. Or in the field the first go around. Or with her teammates anywhere near it.

It was hard not to think about everything that would go into this massive undertaking as she settled onto the cliff face some 13 feet above Sasuke (he’d gotten the mask on). The air here was stagnant and stale. The faint stench of sewers lingering uncomfortably in her nostrils. Perfect conditions to be prepping gas in an open environment. Totally. This was fine.

It really wasn’t and no one should be prepping this shit anywhere for the record.

Honestly making a fuel-air explosive on the fly was… not something they taught at your average ninja school. Firstly, because it was crazy hard to do without killing yourself in the process and second because children are stupid and given a shiny new toy incredibly likely to kill themselves and other with it.

Thankfully Sakura came from a long line of whatever it was mom was telling people and liked to be prepared for anything.

All that really meant was her mother was appalled that the average education of shinobi ended at grade seven and told Sakura to pick something to continue with independently. And since Sakura was Sakura and liked to do research once she found something interesting – like explosions – she generally stayed with it for a while.

(Current interests included explosions, seals, Lady Tsunade, the Second War, and romantic poetry from Uzushio – they liked comparing love to bells, getting the pack to make Kaka-sensei give her a puppy... Also how to destroy the hospital and everything it stood for but that was more of a long term project.) (Holy gods, she hoped Genma wasn’t actually joking and that the hospital really was closed.)

Out of the corner of her eye she could see Sasuke working out his electricity problem and got to work on her own. It wouldn’t matter for shit if she didn’t get a way to trap the hydrogen gas.

Lucky that her match with Shino hadn’t drained much of her chakra. Otherwise there would be no way she could pull this off.

Deep breaths and focus, Sakura thought as she worked through the seals for the mud wall.

Precise chakra control meant she could control how thin her wall was and incidentally the thinner it was the wider her coverage area. Making something an inch thick meant she could stretch it easily twice the distance she needed.

When Sakura had pointed out that chakra usage equaled the volume not surface area of an object to
Kakashi during training a week ago he looked a little faint and had told her to keep that to herself. Or the R&D team would snatch her up and Sakura would never see the light of day again.

That hadn’t really stopped Sakura from babbling her theories at the jounin but he threatened to not give her a puppy and to take the pack away if she didn’t stop. The fucker.

Carefully visualizing the wall (roof. It’s a roof) she molded her chakra just so. The mud stretched and stretched arcing into a careful dome.

Hydrogen gas was light but it liked to cling to itself in corners of rooms so a dome was perfect. With a nearly 1300 square-foot coverage area Sakura wouldn’t be able to do much in the way of jutsu from here on out if she planned on hauling ass as fast as possible when Sasuke was done.

Which she really hoped he’d figured it out since she couldn’t see the Uchiha anymore.

Faint swearing meant he was still alive at least.

Shrugging she placed her explosive tags on top of the dome within arms reach of the cliff. It wasn’t like she could just walk out and place one dead center. That would be cool but the dome was an inch and a half at its thickest point and her weight would easily crumble all her work.

Carefully crawling up the wall she continued to place explosives until she was down to only a quarter of her supply.

Sakura had to be very careful now. The chance of spark igniting the gas was so high it made her nerves come back and her jaw ache from grinding. Circumventing the dome Sakura dared not set foot on the water in case it was electrified and she died from sheer stupidity.

“Sasuke,” she whispered yelled into the incredibly dark cavern she’d made, “Hey are you alive?”

“What Sakura.”

Well he was alive, but he didn’t sound happy about it.

“We should go. Like right now I have all the explosives set.”

She didn’t get a verbal reply but Sasuke slunk out of the gloom looking kinda shitty actually. Sakura thought the boy would always look dashing and beautiful but chakra exhaustion was a bitch and no one looked good when that happened.

Instead he looked a bit like that rat Neji had once thrown at her, gasmask pushed up over his forehead, sweat beading across his upper lip and trailing down from his temples.

Once Sasuke was in her sights Sakura aimed into the dark and threw a series of kunai into the shallows. No sparks from the blades meant no explosions but the bundle of tags she’d attached meant that once she set off her primer tag (yay array modifiers!) all of her tags would go off.

“Can you climb?” Sakura asked. If Sasuke couldn’t Sakura would carry him. If he refused she would knock him out and carry him anyways.

Sasuke looked upwards at the distant spot of sunlight blood draining from his face. He didn’t say anything and just started to climb which Sakura took as an affirmative. She trailed after him silently urging him to climb faster because theoretically there was a monster on its way to die and they needed to be gone long before then.
She also had to pause to place the occasional paper bomb like a trail of breadcrumbs for her chakra to follow.

It didn’t take too long for a couple of chakra enhanced kids to make it to the top and once they did the sounds of distant fighting suddenly became clear.

So did the sound of a booming voice going on about finally getting to the party.

The two shared a wordless look of horror and without speaking took off into the forest. So giant demons can talk, that was good to know.

Fighting demons sucked ass. Ask Naruto all about it. He’d been fighting a giant furry motherfucking dipshit in his head for a decade so he was totally the leading expert here.

Not that he even knew about the fox before. But it still counted.

Anyways this freaky Gaara dude was creepy and scary and also turning into a giant monster that had no interest in teeny tiny Naruto peppering him with shadow clones. (Naruto had no idea where Temari was but for her sake Naruto hoped she’d run as fast and as far as her legs and chakra could take her.)

Sakura said he needed to get Gaara to the gorge cliff of doom and Naruto refused to fail in this. His first attempt at summoning only pulled a tiny frog out of nowhere which sucked.

“Ay yo Kid. Whatcha think’n about? You got shit to do- hop to.”

Gamakichi was such a pain in the ass. And Naruto wasn’t even sure how to send the annoying frog back.

Pakkun wasn’t really helping either. Which was fine, Naruto knew that going in, but seriously? Seriously, the dog could be a little more useful. It was a demon this was a ‘all hands on deck’ situation.

“Shush Gamakichi I’m trying to figure this out. We gotta get that… whatever it is to Sakura ‘n fast.”

The boy, the toad, and the dog all looked up at the demon.

It sounded like the start of a joke, one that goes something like this: a boy, a toad, and a dog all walk into a bar. The barman doesn’t even look at them and instead yells at the dance floor that its time to party!

There isn’t a punchline because Naruto couldn’t think of a punchline. He could only be funny on the fly and this was not on the fly this was… yeah ok it was on the fly but Naruto wasn’t sure how to finish the joke.

“And the barman says to get lost cause there’s no way a boy a toad and a dog all got permits to drink ‘round here.”

Looking down at Pakkun, Naruto found the dog already looking up at him.

“That’s not really… a good punchline I was thinking maybe something about the barman being a
Pakkun shrugged off the criticism. Comedy was an art and it wasn’t his fault if Naruto didn’t see the
genius in it.

“Oi don’t talk shit if you don’ wanna get hit gramps. Imma toad, not some slippery tadpole- I can
drink if I wanna.”

And then the air rippled and Naruto who was at least forty feet from the blast got flung off his feet
and sent tumbling away.

He lay on the ground dazed and terrified. Instinctively Naruto grabbed and curled around the much
smaller beings with him. Pakkun was tucked carefully into one armpit and Gama-chan was on
Naruto’s face.

“You- you saved me. Imma put a good word in with the boss. I got connections.” The vibrations of
the toad’s gullet rippled across Naruto’s face. Yes, it was as gross as it sounded.

Naruto didn’t want to join a toad gang but if it meant he could summon boss toads to a totally boss
battle he would.

“I gotta plan. Pakkun-sensei c’mon,” the dog got stuffed down Naruto’s jacket real quick and the
toad readjusted to the top of Naruto’s head, “Ok ok gonna do this gonna do THIS GONNA DO THIS!”

And with that final war cry the Kyūbi lifted its head out of the murk and hissed a quiet deal into
Naruto’s ear.

One Naruto easily made in exchange for chakra, enough to summon a boss fighter.

See, Naruto was perhaps the best one to fight and lure a demon the size of a mountain because he
knew the biggest baddest gangster mountain boss level fighter around.

(Fuck you fox you ain’t shit a human kicked your ass.)

“Alright alright alright Gamabunta! YEAH! KICK SOME ASS!”

Naruto was super fucking stoked about this toad scroll thing. First it was really cool and could
sparkle – Jiraiya hadn’t believed Naruto but it totally did – and the Fourth had signed it. Like… once
Naruto knew that he was sold. Sure he was a little worried about the ecological implications of
bringing new predatory species into a new environment but that was a problem to deal with when
demons didn’t need an ass kicking.

“Kid you didn’t join my gang. What makes you think I’ll fight for you?”

Gamabunta was big and smoked and his voice already the size of a mountain held more rumble then
a thunderstorm.

On top of the giant toad’s head Naruto hopped around panicking because he needed to get Gaarra or
whatever the fuck that was to the gorge quick and no one was working with him today.

Not the toads or Pakkun or even the fucking demon.

Sakura was working with him but she was basically his boss so that was a given. So was Sasuke but
he was Naruto’s teammate so like???? What else was the bastard supposed to do?
“C’mon I signed your scroll, I joined a cult for you, now you want me to join a gang? Fine! FINE! BUT SAKURA-CHAN AINT GONNA LIKE IT!” Naruto punctuated his yelling with crossed arms and stomping feet. Pakkun got a little squished in the process.

“Why would I care what some human girl thinks about Toad Business?”

It was a legitimate question.

Naruto opened his mouth to yell about his team captain when Pakkun cut the boy off quickly. It would really suck if they lost their one player capable of going head to head with a tailed beast over something so stupid.

“Sakura is the sukeban of Konoha. She’ll understand why Naruto has to join you, she agreed when she let him sign.”

“…a sukeban huh…”

Gamabunta blew out a clouds worth of smoke. Enough to momentarily blot out the dun before dissipating into nothing. He thought about it for a second. A sukeban in Konoha? Hadn’t heard of one of those since Tsunade was a child.

Sounded fun.

“Besides Pops,” Gamakichi paused to wink at the kid who tried to gape up at the toad perched in his own hair, “Naruto saved me from that guy! He tried to beat me up! You should kill ‘em for it!”

Well that settled it then.

“Alright kid whatta we got to do? And I want to talk to this sukeban later.”

Naruto could feel a foxy grin stretch across his face. Fuck yeah this was going to be great.

“You know that big ‘ol hole I summoned you in before? We gotta get that motherfucker in it to blow ‘em up.”

“I dig it.” Gamakichi didn’t really need to have any sort of input in this but it didn’t stop the little toad.

Another big puff of smoke as the boss toad reoriented his mental map. Sure he could manage this.

“You also have to get out of there before it blows. It might kill the host which means it could kill you.” Pakkun swooped in with the most important part.

That was less fun but whatever. Gamabunta didn’t get to run wild anymore and demons was a anything goes situation.

“Alright. Hold on kiddos.” (“To what?” whispered Naruto to his thumbless companions.)

Pulling his pipe free the giant toad grinned a nasty wart covered grin at the sand demon.

“Shukaku,” called Gamabunta because his voice didn’t need to be yelled to carry, “you owe me money.”

The demon, on the move and ready to go raze a village, slowly turned to look over his massive shoulder. So like, Shukaku maybe skipped out on a bill once or twice but he paid his debts. On time and even paid interest when it happened.
Otherwise he woulda gotten kicked out of all the best parties Sandai Hikyō had to offer. The Toads were super fuck’n crazy and knew how to rumble when it suited them. And Shukaku did like to gamble but he was always very careful not to leave anything unsettled with the Toads when it happened.

Though, he had been stuck in this goddamn awful plane of existence for a while and spent a long ass time in a boiler pan (whatever the fuck it was. Shukaku had a metal taste in his mouth forever now k thanks bye) so it was possible he forgot something.

The moment stretched and no one made a move – the pipsqueak on the Toad Boss’s head bouncing around didn’t count as a move. Shukaku slowly squinted at the oyabun.

That cunt was lying.

Since Shukaku was sand he didn’t need to actually turn around to turn around, he instead let his face and arms twist the correct directions for facing a liar. Carefully sucking Gaara into his massive girth as he shifted. It was fun and games to let outsiders maybe kill the little punk but Shukaku had business to settle and the brat waking up now wouldn’t help.

“YOU WANNA FUCK’N GO YOU CHEAT’N LY’IN SON OF A BITCH?!” Shukaku didn’t need to yell but he sure did like yelling so he did anyways and lunged for the toothless clawless froggy.

And Gamabunta met the lunge head on, grabbing at Shukaku was like grabbing at time. Nothing could hold sand in place. So instead he met the attack and blew a mouthful of smoke into the raving beasts giant eyes.

Howling the monster twisted away trying to clear the sting from his face. The sand didn’t help. Hopping backwards – a huge leap to normal sized things in this normal sized world – Gamabunta laughed.

It was mean and loud and Naruto wanted to run away now. So did Pakkun. Gama-chan didn’t, this was great.

And again Shukaku lunged for the toad pushing backwards ready to beat every lying word from his gummy wart mouth. The toad crackled and pulled a tanto to strike at the sand demon’s throat. Or what would have been a throat and was now thin air - the sand twisting away from the weapon.

The reprieve of sand gave Gamabunta enough give to leap again backwards, and slightly to his left (no the other left dumbass).

“How else am I suppose to get my money?”

Shukaku was a stupid son of a bitch but he wasn’t going to fight a lazy son of a bitch even if he was a rumor spreading shitstain.

Gamabunta grinned, again, puffing on his pipe.

“No, see, unlike you I know when to give my opponents a chance to back down. How else am I suppose to get my money?”

To prove it Gamabunta put his tanto away and twirled his pipe across the webbed fingers of his right hand.

And, once more, the predicable demon lunged for the toad.
This time Gamabunta sunk down as low as his massive body could manage and pushed up with his powerful hind legs and jumped. Straight over the charging sand beast.

He landed and jumped again pushing father back, taunting the monster all the while.

“Weakest of the great demons, a cheater, a liar. A disgrace, if only your older brother could see you now.”

And Shukaku who was sensitive at heart despite his monstrous nature cringed and raged because he would not be brought low by a toad of all things.

And then.

And then the toad said the most sacrilegious thing ever spoken to a great spirit demon. Something so heinous that Shukaku swallowed the air bullet he’d been building out of shock.

“No one likes your parties. They’re boring and lame.”

So offended and shocked Shukaku didn’t notice the toad grabbing the kid and straight up tossing him away. He didn’t notice the little puff of smoke indicating a summon had just left. No all he saw was the giant target he was about to kill then eat.

And then throw a victory party to prove that his parties were literally killer.

This time he would kill that smug wart covered future sashimi dish.

So Shukaku, who was not one to learn from his mistakes, lunged for the boss toad who met him head on. Enough so that when Gamabunta tipped backwards into a valley Shukaku fell with him. But unlike Gamabunta, Shukaku was tied to this world and could not simply whisk away like smoke and shadow.

So Gamabunta fell, and Shukaku fell, and when Gamabunta vanished the world went up in fire and steam and dust and heat and everything awful and horrifying. For a moment Shukaku thought his big brother Kurama had seen this fight and was so disappointed he decided to scatter his stupid little brother across all the known world.

Fragmented and left to reform over a hundred hundred years.

Twisting and using everything he could pull from his little human container, Shukaku guarded the punk. Cradling the boy as best he could from the explosion. His sand turned to glass and Shukaku vanished as Gaara jolted awake.

It might be enough to save the kid and save his own skin but Shukaku wasn’t sure. He wasn’t sure what happened or how a human had made something so powerful. Even in nothing but the soul of a human Shukaku could still feel the echoing boom of the detonation twisting into his sand and solidifying his body in glass and shattered remnants.

It hurt. Oh how it hurt. Shukaku could not scream the pain away and neither could the boy suffocating in fireblown glass and limp dunes.

And then there was nothing.
So Gamabunta was the coolest dude to ever walk the planet and Naruto couldn’t wait for Sakura to meet him. That was going to be amazing and incredible.

It sucked that the big guy had to toss Naruto like that but whatever he made it work. Naruto had even stuck his landing flinging his hands high into the air.

Pakkun the best dog in the world intoning “ten” in agreement of a great stick.

And then Naruto started running. Sakura said he had to ditch so he was gonna get the hell out of dodge of whatever was coming.

Pakkun still tucked into Naruto’s jacket suddenly barked out “GO LEFT” and Naruto swerved almost directly into a falling Sasuke.

Catching the boy Naruto blinked down at the sudden damsel - gas mask tiara and all - draped across a tree branch (Naruto failed to catch the boy) and then blinked at Sakura.

“Hey, uh, Shukaku is in the hole.”

“Great - let’s go.”

Sakura with a face of determination swept down and flung Sasuke across her shoulders and started running.

“Probably chakra exhaustion.” Whispered Pakkun to the blond.

“Ohhh…” Naruto thought about it and decided that made no sense. “What’s that mean can people run out of chakra? Since when? I don’t!”

“Naruto shutup and run! We can discuss this in the office!”

Sakura sounded breathless and scared. Honestly, the sounds of a monster fight going down was one sure fire way to get peoples nerves up and Sakura was no exception to that rule.

And Sakura carefully counting her steps – her chakra enhanced fast steps so much larger then her normal swinging stride – figured they were far enough away not to die in the blast and activated her primer tag.

Following her trail of bread crumbs Sakura’s chakra hopped from one activated seal to another finally finding its home in the array key simultaneously detonating one hundred and thirty-two modified explosive tags.

Which ignited hydrogen gas in an open aerated oxygen heavy environment that in turn flash boiled a pond and a stream and every single surrounding particle of water.

To say step four of the plan went boom would be an understatement.

Boom did not adequately describe the sound the explosion made. Nor did bang, or pow, or roar, or even kaboom.

The explosion was so loud Sakura couldn’t hear anything at all. Her own heartbeat, the throbbing in her jaw and behind her eyes. Her worry for her team and Konoha. Those she could hear but those were not sounds.

And this explosion, this detonation, the bombardment, ignition – whatever it should be called was not something anyone could prepare for.
Sakura and her team were out of the immediate blast area but that didn’t stop the shock wave that knocked them off their feet.

The wave radiated outwards – knocking people, shifting balance, toppling entire shelves to the floor.

And Konoha? Walled Konoha? It was a big place. It had to be. So the Konoha city proper? That was a-ways away from the epicenter and yet the explosion shook the world just enough that a building, rapidly losing structural integrity from tree growth, crumbled just enough on its eastern weight bearing wall that the great professor lost his footing just for a moment and was not stabbed through the heart.

Instead the Sword of Kusunagi stabbed through Sarutobi Hiruzen’s upper left lung. A damning wound but not one that would impede the Third from completing his quest.

Not that Sakura or the rest of Team 7 would ever know the small part they played in the death of Orochimaru.

Instead they finally collapsed as far as they could manage from the raging fires. Chests heaving Naruto and Sakura both glanced at one another. Neither could say who cracked first but both children started laughing and couldn’t stop until breathlessness forced it.

Pakkun – awake again - stood up on wobbly legs and carefully inspected Sasuke making sure the kid wasn’t about to die. He would probably sleep for a week but the Uchiha was fine.

Sakura and Naruto on the other hand… They’d done good.

So Pakkun walked over to Sakura, the world awash with static god his ears hurt. Peering down at the girl who wouldn’t be able to hear anything anyways Pakkun decided that since these kids where puppies he needed to reward them like puppies.

He carefully licked Sakura’s forehead and cheeks and the tip of her nose and happily squeezed his eyes shut for a wide doggy grin wagging his curly (best) tail the whole time.

He pretended not to notice the tears as he turned to do the same to Naruto. The boy was all ready blubbering. Saying something to an audience that couldn’t hear anything beyond the fading echoes of a boss battle.

When Sasuke woke up Pakkun fully intended on giving the kid the exact same treatment as his teammates.

It was only fitting to treat the litter all the same.

"Hey, hey Sakura-chan." Whisper shouted Naruto from his hospital cot.

Sakura didn't open her eyes "what Naruto I'm not going to fight a toad so you can be in my imaginary gang."

"Uh, no not that. Uh, do you think... anyone remembered to go get Shino out of the woods?"

Silent as the grave Sakura, shakily and tired reached into her weapons pouch on her bedside table and pulled out the super cool shades and put them on.
Then she hit the emergency button taped to her wrist and waited for a nurse to come so she could tell them to go rescue her matchy shades triplet.

Akino, draped across the foot of Sakura's cot and carefully guarding a third of the litter, lifted his head in sunglasses solidarity and woofed gently at the civilian nurse so she wouldn't faint - again - from a talking dog.

"Shino... oh yes he's just over there, third bed from the tent entrance." And the nurse smiled a little and fled the tiny ninja to go handle something normal - like a tree stump growing out of a guys knee cap.

Shino snuggled into his pillow delighted by shades matchyness and that they remembered him enough to send for a rescue party. It was a little disheartening to know Sakura and what was available to form a team hadn't noticed his proximity but Konoha wasn't built in a day and even baby steps were important.

Chapter End Notes

ok its literally 4:30 am so like this is no beta we die like men for realz this time and warning long AN

I had this whole thing written out and hated it so i wrote it again and again and again and then MY MAC DUMPED ALL MY FILES AND I LOST A 11K DOC THAT I KINDA LIKED i recovered an older version at like 6k and went from there but damn this chapter took a lot out of me.

Work is so busy and I'm very tired but there are parts of this chapter i LOVE and parts I'm still going "i have NO FUCKING CLUE how to fix this"

i tried y'all and i hope you like it. also dont mess with hydrogen gas at home it is extremely dangerous and you might die. .........i did hella research for this chapter a la tony stark becoming an expert in thermonuclear astrophysics over night..... Whatever

THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR THE LOVE IT MAKES MY DAY!!! seeing new kudos, and hits, and comments really help the writing process and every bit is like a little nugget of muse. i will be responding to comments but I'm very tired so its slow as always.

AND: i had two winner for the contest last chapter. the answer was Morro and Okkoto from Princess Mononoke!!! so CampionSayn and WhisperingQuill you will have one shots headed your way!!!!

Poll time!!!!! because i honestly love all these answers i get they are so varied and wild! anyways: what is the weirdest rabbit trail of information you have ever followed.

for example i spent literally over 20 hours researching explosions and hydrogen gas. i went on academic forums and asked questions. to real people?????!?!?!??????????? its not the weirdest thing I've ever fallen down the wiki hole on but it sure was a long one.

TLDR: whats the weirdest wikipedia hole you have ever fallen down. dont play with hydrogen at home. chakra makes everything possible. I love all of you. goodnight.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!