Fallen Angel

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**Fallen Angel**

by celestia193, SilverKitsune2017

**Summary**

What happens when your magnolia turns out to be a crow? CIA agents Itachi and Shisui Uchiha are on the hunt for a dangerous shadow-walking serial killer with a kill list a mile long. But an attractive bartender known as 'Alex Maeda' is working day and night to dole out some hard-won justice and put a few more names on that list before the authorities finally catch up with him.

**Notes**

clestia193's Author's Note: Alright, so this story takes place in roughly...halfway through the 24th century. So we've got a combination of high tech and supernatural elements. But there are a few things to note. The most important of which is how the CIA works. They work by gathering intelligence abroad (for the most part), but they do not retain the power to enforce law and make arrests (at least, they're not legally supposed to). For the purpose of this story, their workings have evolved to include these functions, as well as functions surrounding the committing of international crime by supernatural beings. Seeing as this is set quite a ways into the future...just go with it.

That said, this story is kinda my baby, hence all of the angst that you'll be hit with. I do love my angst, especially when my Uchiha boys are involved. but there will be a happy ending eventually, because Silver would never let me get away with anything less. So sit back, read, and enjoy this latest addition to the Uchihac'est persuasion in the Naruto fandom.

Also, this story has been edited furiously more times than I care to admit.
A Vampire and a Serial Killer Working a Bar

Swirling around the drink in his glass, the raven stares absently out across the bar at the room full of people, human and supernatural alike. The soft gold plasma lighting along the walls reflects off the matching amber of his eyes. He wasn't usually much one for drinking, but he could hold his alcohol with the best of them. The best of the humans, anyway. There was no way he was ever going to hold a candle to the vampire bartender across the silver titanium and ancient red oak bar-top from him. His vampire guardian was the one who taught him how to drink, after all.

The deceptively young-looking immortal across from him, as far as Sasuke could tell, was at least four and a half centuries old. The redhead would occasionally let slip a reference to the French Revolution, an old part of history that he'd made sure Sasuke learned about, despite it being old news, to put it lightly.

He didn't mind learning about things that happened in the eighteenth century, but honestly, even the records of the twenty-first century bored him. What were people THINKING electing some of those leaders. If he could find a time-machine and head back, he'd have taken out half the leaders in the first half of the century alone. Not that the twenty-second century had been great, but at least it wasn't the disaster that came before it.

Still, there were a few good things from his friend's youth that he appreciated. Canadian whiskey being one of them. The vampire's tolerance for his extracurriculars…was also a benefit these past few years. The level gaze tinged with a hint of worry, however, was not. "I'm fine, Gaara, there's no need to look at me like that." Again, as was usual for the young-looking vampire.

For a few agonizing seconds, Gaara berates himself for being caught so easily. His emotions really shouldn't be so easily deciphered. He banished that thought as quickly as it had come though. This was Sasuke. Not one of his many intoxicated patrons. "There's every need." It was fine for Sasuke to see through his mask. "Your luck will run out sooner or later." Save for Gaara's siblings, there was no one that the vampire could think of who he trusted more. "You know that. Retire while there is still time."

He knew that he was being hypocritical of course. "I got out and so can you." Granted, the seductive madness of bloodlust that had held Gaara captive for so many decades was a far cry from the other man's personal demons, but to some degree...darkness was darkness. "There's still time. The work that you do is noble, but how do you think your clients would feel if you were to join them?"

At the rate that Sasuke was going, that was an all too real possibility. Honestly, Gaara would prefer the young man join him as a vampire rather than to follow the spirits he assisted to an early grave. Which is what would happen if he didn't stop pushing his luck. The clock was ticking. With every second that passed by, the chances of Sasuke getting caught increased. It was a good thing that Gaara didn't need to breathe anymore and his heart no longer beat, otherwise the Uchiha would have given him a heart attack.

"I can't…you know that." Sasuke's crusade would only end when he saw that man dead at his feet, a vendetta born of the painful deaths of dozens of innocent victims. "That snake is still kicking, and you know that I can't live or die until he's wiped from the face of the earth." It was the only thing keeping him going, and had been for a long time now. Everyone he took down in the process just had it coming as much as that man did.

It wasn't that Gaara had never felt the need for revenge before. He could sympathize with that
desire. "After he is dead and buried, will that be enough for you?" He had grown up in a time
where the desire for it was as common as the air that he used to breathe, but Sasuke was sowing the
seeds of his own demise. They both knew it.

Sasuke tips the last of the whiskey down his throat and laughs bitterly. "I don't know. I guess I'll
find out after I cut him to pieces and burn him down inside that torture house of his." He was in no
mood for mercy. "Besides, you know that there's always more people out there like him, even if the
damn authorities don't know it. They might have ears, but they don't know how to listen." And that
just meant more work for him.

"As much as I would love to slaughter all of those types, it's an impossible game." He shakes his
head as he looks at Sasuke with sympathy. "One monster will always replace another."

"...I know." He wasn't blind, Sasuke knew how dark society's underbelly could be. That's where he
spent his time after all. "But at least I can do something about it. My ears aren't just for decoration,
and I don't really mind having a little extra blood on my hands." It was, after all, what he did best.
"I know that they'll catch up to me sooner or later, but they haven't yet. And as long as I can take
out the snake before they do, I don't care what's done with me." He might go to prison for the rest
of his life, or some country might demand he be executed on the spot. But that was fine with him.
As long as he accomplished this last goal, nothing else mattered.

"You know, your playing of the part of the martyr is very inconsiderate of you." Gaara sighs as he
pours himself a shot of Irish whiskey. "After I went through all that trouble to save you, the least
you could do is not rush to an early grave."

"Considering that no one saw you coming, and you had your brother and sister as backup, I don't
see how it could have been that much trouble." Not that Sasuke wasn't grateful. He was. Gaara was
the best thing to ever happen to him…not that that was a very high bar to begin with, but still.
"Though it's not like I asked you to rescue me." Not that he could have asked anyone with the
means to. The ghosts couldn't help, after all…well, save for the fact that they'd apparently gone to a
vampire hanging out in Montreal and put aside their dislike of the nightwalkers long enough to get
the rumor through that a spirit medium was in trouble.

The red head shakes his head. "I hope you find your flower." God knows the man needed to get
laid. "Maybe, they'll remove that stick that is shoved so deeply up your posterior and you'll be able
to think straight afterward."

Sasuke twitches, his gaze darkening at the mention of the tattoo. "I hope that I never meet them.
They'll be better off never knowing I exist." The tattoo had blossomed across his skin when he was
thirteen as puberty began taking hold. Stories of soulmates were something he'd put behind him
long ago as part of the past that no longer existed, the past in which he had parents who loved him
and told him romantic and fantastic stories of the day that he would find his soulmate.

Stories and dreams that were ripped apart by that snake and the parents who handed him over to be
a lab rat. All his love had turned to hatred, and his soulmate never came. Only Gaara and his
siblings. And how Sasuke wished it were Gaara…it would be so easy if the magnolia on his arm
was reflected on Gaara's own.

"You might not see it, but you're more a romantic than I am." Gaara looks at him and sighs. "I hope
that you find them before you get yourself killed for being a martyr, Alex." The name felt like
poison on his tongue. Gaara knew damn well that wasn't Sasuke's real name. Of course, like
everything else about the man, it was carefully crafted. It would have been stupid of him to use his
real identity. Hopefully, his 'Flower' would knock some sense into him.
Everyone had two tattoos on their arms that appeared during puberty. One was a clue as to who your greatest enemy would be and the other was a clue about your soulmate. Sasuke's soulmate was signified by, of all things, a fucking flower. Fate could be ironic, sometimes. That was the only explanation that Gaara could come up with for why his friend had a flower tattoo on his arm and not something more, well Sasuke-like.

Sasuke rolls his eyes at the clipped tone. "Don't say my name like that, Gaara." He'd picked it because it was his middle name, because even if it wasn't safer, it felt more natural to pick a name he actually had, instead of someone else's. "And if I wanted to find this flower soulmate, I would have done it a long time ago." It had been seven years now since Gaara had appeared, wrenching the entire wall off of his blindingly bright cage and carted him out and away from Montreal. Seven years of freedom, and not once had he given into the weak temptation of seeking out the one with the matching magnolia that he kept hidden under makeup and long sleeves.

"You're formidable in your own right, but I have no fear of someone who can't think clearly." He smirks at Sasuke. He couldn't resist taunting him. "I was once like you. Blinded by one desire and thought of little else." The desire for blood. "There could be more for you, but you won't allow yourself to have it. Which is a shame because you aren't just punishing yourself." He glances at the flower on Sasuke's arm before getting another shot of whiskey.

"I'm protecting them from me." Sasuke was under no illusions as to what he was, and he doubted that any sane person would be happy with a murderer for a soulmate. Vampires were forgivable, they had a reason to kill, even if they did it very rarely nowadays. But he was human, there was no innate desire to kill. At least, no more than any other human. There was no excuse, no reason, he just killed on his own agenda, and he had a very specific range of targets. Sure, he made society better by taking them out, but it was still murder. And he knew that one day, he would have to face that music. And he was not afraid.

Gaara sighs as he looks around the nightclub he owned. It was a perfect mixture of the mundane and supernatural in his mind and yet, it just couldn't snap Sasuke out of his self-appointed mission.

"Very well then." He sighs as he looks at Sasuke. "Tell me about this Gato you're after." He was going to end up dead. If Gaara was intelligent, he'd slowly start distancing himself from Sasuke. From someone who was going to willingly walk straight into their own coffin and had no intention of coming out, but he wasn't. Temari had always been the brains of their family.

Sasuke's eyes close, a wave of sadness and nostalgia rolling over him. "...I told you about Haku, right? The one from Hokkaido, he had the cryokinetic abilities." The ice power that was so beautiful...that entertained Sasuke a little when they were still children.

Gaara didn't like where this was going. Sasuke seemed sad about Haku. That could only mean one thing. "Yes, you've mentioned him in passing. Gato killed him, I take it?" Haku's name had stood out amongst the sea of victims that Orochimaru had created over the years. It was rare for Sasuke to speak fondly of anyone.

"...Yeah." Sasuke had hoped that Haku would have had a better life once he was out of Orochimaru's reach, but it seemed that his friend hadn't gotten off so easily. "...He found his soulmate, but from what he told me...Gato had them both killed, even though he was the one who'd hired them in the first place." It was just supposed to be security, but it looked like everything had gone wrong. Sasuke couldn't allow that transgression against his friend to stand. That's why he'd already checked out the flight he would smuggle himself onto and packed his overnight bag. Gato had to die.

The red head sighs as he knew he was going to need a lot of shots to get through this night. "Fate
can be cruel sometimes." The boy had gained his freedom and found love only to be killed by a criminal. "I can't begrudge you wanting to avenge Haku and his match." He wouldn't even bother to try in this instance. "Just be careful."

"I know." Sasuke was never reckless, not like that. His entire life might be reckless, but in specific instances, he was always careful. After all, there was no killing a target without getting to them first. "And when I get back, Orochimaru is next." He would finally put and end to the one who had plague him for all these years. He'd finally found Orochimaru's secret home, where he could find the villain and kill him in peace. And then that would be the end of it, Sasuke could, in theory, finally retire. But he doubted it would be so simple. After all, the innocent victims would continue to find him, making their requests and pointing him towards those who'd done them wrong. And as always, he would be compelled to help them seek their justice. Their revenge.

The redhead had absolutely no idea what he was going to do with the other man. Though that was a question for another time. Something had caught the corner of Gaara's eye. Something...beautiful and translucent. "Alright." He half stifles a groan as he smacks his forehead. "Though I have half a mind to ask some fairy to smother you in pixie dust till you come to your senses after all that." He wouldn't deny Sasuke his rightful kills, but after that...well, all bets were off.

"I'm sure that you'll be smothered before I am." After all, Gaara was the one who owned and worked the bar, not him. Though not because it hadn't been offered. "Though if you're really so much less of a romantic than I am, it explains why I've never seen you dragging a fairy home at night." And he'd seen his redheaded friend eyeing one fairy in particular the few nights he was here to witness it.

"I doubt it." Gaara shakes his head. He'd barely gotten a decent look at any of the handful of fairies brave enough to come to his club. "Fairies avoid my kind like the plague." For good reason. They did occupy completely different niches as far as mother nature was concerned.

"Not even that one with the dark hair and lavender wings?" Sasuke raises a mischievous eyebrow. "I know that she's never come up to the bar before, but I've see you looking from over here." And from what little Sasuke had seen, she was pretty enough, for a woman. "You could probably offer to take the drinks over instead of having her psychic friend come pick them up."

"Aren't you the romantic all of a sudden when it's not your own love life involved?" Gaara rolls his eyes. He was being foolish. "My club has a good reputation. Which is why a handful of fairies are brave enough to come here." None would talk to him though. "That doesn't make them foolish enough to defy their instincts to avoid a natural predator of theirs."

Vampires didn't hate fairies. Far from it. They loved them to death. Their blood was like...pure sugar to them, ambrosia, and a million other good things all rolled into one. Fairies couldn't die of old age, but being drained of all their blood was one way to kill them. Even magic had its limits.

"Well, you're long past your ripper phase, so I don't see why you couldn't control yourself and at least pretend to be a decent person while talking to her." After all, even if Sasuke wasn't getting any action now or...ever, it didn't mean Gaara had to abstain. "I'm sure that once you turn on the charm, she'd forgive you for being a meddling asshole."

How could he say this without sounding vain? "If I wanted physical companionship, I'm quite capable of finding it." Hell, he did find it. "I do indulge in such things now and then when you're not looking." Sasuke didn't strike him as a voyeur and he wasn't necessarily one to 'Kiss and Tell,' himself.

So, the old vampire actually WAS getting laid. That was news to Sasuke. Sure, Gaara was hot, but
his personality was often so stony that no one wanted to get near him. "Well, I'm glad to see that
you're not completely out of practice." He smirks as he reaches to pour himself another couple
shots of whiskey. "Things tend to get rusty and limp if you don't exercise them enough."

Gaara would have sputtered if it wasn't beneath his dignity to do so. He was over four hundred
years old. Vampires like him didn't sputter. "Well then, I suppose you would know." The red head
rolls his eyes and bites back a hiss. "Seeing as I don't believe you've ever gotten any 'practice' in."

Sasuke rolls his own eyes, not bothering to stop himself. "Seeing as I have little to no interest in
people beyond killing them, I don't see how that's an issue." He might have been a romantic once,
but his interest in finding it for himself had died long ago. For other people, he could do it, but for
himself, he couldn't muster the needed motivation.

"In any case, it's best to leave the fairies to their own devices." Gaara stretches lazily. "I think I'll
go find a feeder." A human who would willingly let him feed off of them for one reason or
another. Sometimes for money, sometimes for the thrill of it, and there were some who fell into
both camps. There was little need to hunt in the modern world, especially in large cities were
vampire groupies existed in excess.

Sasuke sighs, rolling his eyes once more as he hops over the bar and takes Gaara's place behind it.
"Fine, I'll cover for you here. You go find yourself a walking blood bag." Not that he was formally
trained as a bartender, he'd just picked up the basics from watching Gaara and trained himself from
there. And sometimes, if Gaara wanted out from behind the bar, Sasuke would take his place and
make sure that the drinks kept flowing.

"How kind of you." Gaara smirks as he heads off to do precisely that. "Especially after tormenting
me." Even vampires needed to eat.

The psychic chuckles as he watches the vampire stalk away to track down some willing prey,
before turning his gaze to the bar as a couple of guys down the bar call for a round of beer. Not the
most tasteful option in this place, but the vampire never had stocked the cheap crap. No, he'd made
sure that some of the best beer, stout, and ale available was on tap, coming from Italy, Scotland,
Germany, Belgium, and of course...Ireland. Not to mention the hard spirits shelf at the back of the
bar with featured labels from around the world.

Gaara smiles when he sees a brunette and saunters over to her. "Tenten, right?" He wasn't entirely
sure if she was human or a supernatural, but he knew she came to the bar because a fairy named
Neji did. Still, she seemed to like vampires well enough. She might be willing.

Tenten blinks, nods, then looks the vampire up and down. Neji had told her about this one,
something about looking at his cousin, right? "Yeah." Wait...this was the guy from the bar, right?
"You're the bartender, aren't you?"

"One of them." Gaara smiles at her. "I'm also the club's owner." Why did she look at him so
suspiciously? He hadn't done anything out of the ordinary yet.

Oh, well, that explained a lot. "Sorry, I just..." Tenten laughs bashfully. "I just thought that you
might get in trouble with your boss if you played hooky from the bar, but...you're the boss, so..."
Well, that was silly of her. Though, to be fair, it wasn't often that you met a club owner who
worked his own bar. "Sorry, yes, I'm Tenten." She smiles warmly, trying to cover for her mistake.

"There's no need to apologize." He smiles fantastically at her. "I was wondering, if I might ask
you for a small favor."
From the bar, Sasuke twirls a mixer around in his hands as he keeps an eye on Gaara. Not that he didn't trust the vampire to keep his wits about him and be nice to the girl, he did. In fact, he would go so far as to say that he trusted Gaara's ability to control himself better than his own. At least, with regards to their own targets. This girl, though, her danger level ranked...maybe a two on the scale, and a zero for threat. Sasuke only took on six and above.

Still, as long as nothing happened under his watch, all was well.

He pours a bright blue drink into a couple of martini glasses, dropping a cherry and raspberry into each. Why these girls wanted such a sweet and sour drink was beyond him, but without the extra sugar and shots of blue raspberry liqueur, he could almost enjoy it himself. Almost. "Order up, two Electric Raspberries." Electric was right, they could probably conduct a mountain of voltage.

The girls quickly dart over to get their drinks. Immediately, they commence Operation Eyelash. It was an age old operation. One that any coed worth their salt would try to land themselves a hottie.

Sasuke slides the drinks smoothly across the polished metal and wood counter-top. "For you ladies. Sorry for the wait. Gaara decided he needed a break from standing behind the bar." The charming mask was in place, something that Sasuke did whenever he took over the bar. After all, it wouldn't do to scare all of Gaara's customers away by glaring at them. Though he still would have kept an eye on the coeds just in case. He'd rather not see them toddle home drunk and vulnerable, after all, it would weigh too heavily on his conscience if something happened to them.

"Thanks!" They beam at him, batting their eyelashes. "So what are you doing later?" After all, they didn't see a ring on his hand. So in theory he was fair game.

"Packing and catching a few hours of sleep." After all, bar-tending wasn't his actual 'job', so to speak, and Sasuke had places to be. "I'm heading to Chicago to see a friend."

"Oh well, have fun in Chicago!" They try to hide their disappointment. "That's so cool that you're all international and stuff!" After all, he was supposed to be coming back, right?

Fun, huh? Sasuke supposed that was one way of putting it. "Mhm, I've been all over the world. Columbia, China, Japan, England, Scotland, Greece, Italy, Russia, Estonia, South Africa." In fact, short of Antarctica, he'd been to every continent. "This will always be home, though." Or close enough to it that he kept coming back.

Hearts begin appearing in their eyes. Oh boy. Maybe, he shouldn't have said that. They were now in full on Gushing Coed Mode.

Sasuke blinks, fighting hard to resist the urge to take a few steps back. He knew that look, though he hadn't met many Canadian university students who would give it to him. It was mostly the American exchange students studying abroad that did it. Some were fine, but some were just so...ditzy. "Is there anything else the two of you would like?" So long as he stayed professional, they would fly away and leave him alone.

He was saved by a blonde vampiress. "There you are!" Regulars would known her as Temari. Gaara's sister. "Alex, you've really got to stop taking these late shifts." These girls weren't regulars though and the eldest of the Sabaku Siblings knew that. "Come on. Let's get you out of here. My brother is such a slavedriver sometimes." She wraps her arms around his back for emphasis as if to say, 'Mine.'

He wasn't sure whether to sigh in relief or laugh. It wasn't the first time she'd done this, and Sasuke never knew if it would be the last, but he was grateful for it nonetheless. "Well, you know your
brother, when it's time for him to feed, someone has to take over the bar." He relaxes slightly in her hold and wraps an arm around her waist, confident in the knowledge that Temari had no attraction to him whatsoever. "I'll finish up these last few orders then turn the bar back over to Gaara. He should be done in about ten minutes."

"Alright." She smiles at him. "Though you won't be done with me nearly as quickly as you are tending the bar. I have the day off tomorrow." Temari didn't seem to have an issue laying it on thick because her hand trails over the his hip and almost into some dangerous territory. "I'll see you then. I'm going to go yell at him." She smiles at the girls. "Oh it was nice meeting you." Before bounding off. Her mission had been accomplished.

Sasuke represses a smirk as the girls gape like a pair of fish, the faux smile back on his face as his fake girlfriend saunters away. "Sorry about that, Temari can be a little pushy when I don't give her enough attention. She gets a little antsy before I leave on trips." He could lay it on thick as well, and the results were hilarious. "Now, what were we talking about?"

"Oh um nothing." They smile at him. "I think maybe we should have another drink and call a cab." Well, you win some. You lose some.

Sasuke sighs silently with relief. That was close.
We Have Ourselves a Serial Killer

Chapter Summary

And here's one of the reasons for all of the murder tags.

A finger flicks through the air as Shisui changes the channel on the giant holo-projector in the break room. It was his usual pastime at work, since watching the news could give them advance leads on any cases that might get bumped up from the police, to the FBI, and then to the CIA. It didn't happen often, but when it did, he felt that it was always best to be prepared.

He'd been at this eight years, ever since he'd been promoted to handling actual cases. Like every Uchiha, he'd been expected to get his degrees in record time, going to the University of Maryland to earn his graduate degree. Sure, it wasn't as shiny as his cousin's Yale degrees, but Shisui was content in his choice. The school had one of the best criminal justice programs in the country, which was why it was excruciatingly hard to get into.

The news channels flick on, and he scrolls through the available stories. A building burned down, the arsonist still at large. Pass. A jewelry store robbed. Pass. Two celebrities getting married. It would only last three years before they divorced. He continues flicking through the news channels, looking for something…probably related to murder. They dealt mostly with terrorism and cases of international murder. Sometimes espionage. That was fun.

"Your thoughts are disturbing." Itachi shakes his head as he strides into the room. "It's a good thing all those women of yours see your pretty face before they get a glimpse inside your head." Otherwise, they'd probably run screaming.

Itachi, like most of his family, was gifted with magic. Or supernatural abilities. Or whatever one decided to call it these days. His ability was mind-reading. Thankfully, he could turn it on and off mostly at will these days. Had that not been the case, he was quite certain he would have gone insane by now. Like his distant relative, Obito. The man had once been amongst the best of the best. Now, half the time he thought he was someone named Tobi and Tobi was a complete and utter simpleton. He was always going on about what a good boy he was. It was quite tragic really.

"Anything worthy of note?" He looks at his cousin anxiously. "Besides Tobi's rantings." The other half of the time, well Obito could compete with even Madara when it came to power and cunning.

"Not yet, I'm just scrolling through the channels to see if the FBI is going to end up dumping any of the NYPD's cases on us." Shisui was always one of the more sympathetic ones to Obito's plight. His empathic abilities told him that even if Obito was strange at times, the man meant well. He just came off as a bit…overenthusiastic and darkly so.

In that respect, he was glad that Itachi's gift hadn't appeared very much until he was around sixteen years old. It was a little later than their gifts usually appeared, but it gave Shisui the time to recover from his own misfortunes regarding his gift and pass his experience on to Itachi before the worst of the damage could be done. After all, drawing in the emotions of all those around you was not a power to be taken lightly, and Shisui had had a rough go of it when he was a teenager. Itachi's late
blooming was also the reason, Shisui suspected, that his gift was so strong. Like an infant in the womb, it had more time to develop within him before making its appearance into the world, and therefore it manifested in full glory when it did.

It also meant that for his last year of high school, his already genius cousin had to both rein in his power, as well as take all of his final exams, which he had to try not to accidentally cheat on. He managed it, only to collapse in bed for a week after that. And Shisui had been so proud.

"I thought as much." Itachi sighs as he looks at Shisui. "I do sometimes feel bad for him and I know he means well, but the man is half out of his mind." The other half was terrifying.

Shisui chuckles wryly as his finger continues working through the channels. "Wasn't it you who said that madness is just another name for genius when people don't understand it?" Besides, it's not like it was Obito's fault, it was just the unfortunate roll of the genetic dice. Psychic abilities ran in their family, some strong, some not. If he hadn't been so well-adjusted, he could have gone the same way as Obito, and Itachi might very well have followed.

"That's true." Still, Itachi wasn't entirely sure whether or not the 'good boy' would murder them all in their sleep one day. "Be that as it may, we'll figure out what our cases are in time."

"Yeah, but-" Shisui blinks, losing his train of thought as he scrolls through a newly breaking story. "What the…"

Across the screen flashed the image of a portly older man with a less than charming smile and a wispy moustache next to the running video of an attractive young reporter. "Early this morning, NYPD officers found the wealthy shipping magnate Gato brutally murdered in his home. The story comes from a distressed housekeeper who called 911 upon discovering the body. Sources say that Mr. Gato was eviscerated and left lying in a pool of his own blood, but the NYPD refuses to release images, as they are currently pursuing the investigation. Allegedly, the killer left four guards dead alongside Mr. Gato, and critics are wondering if this has anything to do with a previous incident surrounding Mr. Gato, in which two of his bodyguards were found similarly murdered just last week." Pictures of a half masked man and an effeminate young man pop onto the screen. "We'll be back with more news on the story in three hours. Stay tuned."

The elder agent stares blankly at the screen, his mind whirring with possibilities and theories. "Well, that's something new."

It didn't take a genius to realize what their next case would be. "Yes, new and brutal." Itachi had seen a lot, but it was rare to see that level of carnage even in his line of work.

"So, tell me…” Shisui loved asking Itachi this question. "Do you think we're going to be dealing with a psycho or a psychopath this time?" Itachi had the psychology degree, he was the behavioural analyst between the two of them. That meant that he would be able to peg a psychopath a mile away. Psychopaths…were decidedly less fun than people who were just straight up psycho. They were also a lot harder to outsmart, even for a couple of Uchiha geniuses.

"Psychopath."

There was no doubt about it. "A psycho wouldn't go through this much trouble for a high profile target or if they did, they would have gotten caught." This person wasn't an amateur. Itachi knew that much for damn sure.

Shisui groans, knowing exactly what that meant. "Alright, I'll call up the lab and the tech department, make sure that they're ready just in case the case comes in." It wasn't something that was going to be taken lightly, that's for sure. And though technically, the CIA wasn't supposed to be involved in domestic affairs, Shisui doubted that the killer would just hang around the area after
killing an international businessman. No, he would probably have found a border somewhere. Maybe Mexico?

"I'll go and speak with Jiraiya." Itachi pauses, taking in the sight of the paused news report once more. "I believe I know where I'm going next." He turns on heel and steps out of the room, making for the office down the hall that he'd been escorted into on his very first day. Only this time, he was no rookie needing an orientation package.

The door to the department head's office stood open, as it always did unless Jiraiya was in a meeting. Even he knew that sometimes, you didn't want the entire department hearing about the sorts of secrets they had to deal with at times.

But today was not one of those days. No, today was one of the days Jiraiya loathed, when there was nothing but paperwork to do. Who ever did actual paperwork anymore!? And then there was a request from the commissioner of the NYPD to have CIA assets added to one of their most recent cases. Because in addition to handling international matters, the CIA also had specialists who were better suited to dealing with more…unique problems in cases. Particularly when there were supernaturals involved.

"I've seen the news." Itachi walks into his office. "I assume I know which case I will be on next. The one to find Gato's killer?" He forces a grim smile onto his face.

The old pervert sighs and eyes the holo-disc on his desk. "They've already sent the request in. The NYPD tried to hand it off to the FBI, but the FBI found something that…requires a more specialized touch. If you and Shisui want the case, it's yours. But I warn you, it won't be easy."

None of their cases were ever easy. "I think we can handle it." That was why they became their cases in the first place.

Jiraiya nods, then he reaches for the disc with the compiled information, or lack thereof, that the NYPD and FBI had put together. "Then take this and get to work. If anyone can figure out how to track down an invisible killer, I'm sure it'll be the two of you." He tosses the thin convex metal disc to one of his prized agents. If he had his way, he would never let either Uchiha go.

Itachi nods as he takes the disc. This would probably mean a few sleepless nights, but he couldn't let such a savage killer roam the streets. It would be worth it. This was what he was born to do.

"Thank you." He nods as he heads off to show Shisui the case. "This is bound to be interesting to say the least."

"What's going to be interesting?" Shisui pokes his head out of the break room, tucking away the communicator in his hand as he watches his cousin approach. "You know, you really shouldn't talk to yourself out loud, Itachi."

"Habit." He shrugs as he shows him the disc. "I was right. We're dealing with Gato's murder and this is all the information we have on it." Jiraiya had said the invisible killer. This wouldn't be easy.

Shisui raises an eyebrow as he takes the disc and clicks the center button, pressing his thumb into the scanner. "Alright, let's see what we're dealing with." He tosses the disc onto the table in the middle of the room, where it spins in place, whirring quietly as turquoise screens materialize in the air, police and FBI reports flashing across it. "They work fast."

But his eyes narrow as he focuses in on a particular report from the FBI on the matter of the forensics. "…They think it's a supernatural. Some sort of teleporter who got in and out without
tripping the alarms, and who was skilled enough not to leave any evidence behind, save the murder victims." And the images of the bodies were not...pleasant. They'd been brutally eviscerated like they were hunted animals. "...Okay, I feel like throwing up."

Itachi wasn't far behind, but manages to fight back the bile growing in his throat. "I'm inclined to agree." About everything, especially the last part. "The question is what are we going to do about all these facts?"

Taking a deep breath, Shisui clicks to another, less revolting set of images. The bodies of the guards were not nearly as gruesomely attacked, not like Gato's, but they were still rather horrifying. Clearly, this killer was far too dangerous to be allowed to roam free. This could be their highest profile case yet. Maybe even in their entire careers. "First, we put together a profile on the killer. We'll need to establish motive, and we'll need to find out if this was an isolated incident, or if the killer has done this before." The sheer lack of information left behind made him believe that this was not an isolated incident. No one just got this good out of the blue.

Normally, Shisui tried not to take his work home with him, and Itachi typically followed the same rule. But with a case like this, it was just too tempting not to bring it home and have dinner over it. Not over any of the graphic images, of course, but over the preliminary psych reports that were sadly lacking, and the evidence files, which were essentially non-existent.

Still, he sits at the pristine granite-topped kitchen island, eating a sandwich as he goes over the intricacies of the security system, watching the tapes over and over, looking for anything that might provide the clue they needed in order to figure out just what kind of killer they were dealing with. On the other side of the island, Itachi was looking through the psych report and frowning that way he did whenever procedures weren't up to his almighty standards.

So he swallows his mouthful of sandwich and fixes his cousin with a playful stare. "Careful Itachi, keep glaring at it like that and I might think you were going to take it on a date."

"That makes absolutely no sense." Itachi couldn't help but roll his eyes. "None of this is very useful. All I know is these kills are definitely personal and this person is intelligent. Highly so." If they didn't meet the technical criteria for a genius, Itachi would be shocked to put it mildly.

"Great." Exactly what Shisui wanted to hear...that it was going to be difficult to outsmart their target, even for them. "Okay, then let's go over what we do know. The killer used some sort of bladed weapon, not coated with any natural or synthetic poison, no toxins, no plasma residue left behind." That ruled out a great number of potential weapons. It also begged a few very odd questions. "If we're dealing with a supernatural who can pass themselves off as invisible, maybe we're dealing with a vampire instead of a teleporter." It would be odd for a vampire to use a blade instead of their fangs but considering that it felt like it might be an antique weapon, it would make more sense for such a thing to come from an older supernatural, rather than a younger one.

"I wouldn't say vampire." Itachi shakes his head. There was one thing wrong with that. "A vampire wouldn't waste that much blood or at least, they'd be a rather rare specimen...if they went that route." It'd be like a lion killing a zebra and just leaving it there. Didn't make any sense.

"True." Shisui had thought it suspicious as well. "Alright, then I'll scratch that off the list." He runs his fingers through a floating list, a bright blue streak running through the word vampire, alongside the names of many other supernaturals discarded as possible suspects. "That brings us back to teleporter, but there were no signs of extra-dimensional atomic particles floating around, so unless they're using a special pocket dimension solely for teleportation, it can't be any that pass through the fourth, fifth, or sixth dimensions." Of course, there were as many ways of teleporting as there
was to make a telescope, so that only cut the list in half.

The big question was still why. Why kill Gato? Sure, Shisui didn't like the man very much, but why go after a shipping magnate instead of say... a senator or a cop, or a federal agent? "Alright, I have an idea." Shisui flicks his wrist, bringing up a whole new screen. "Itachi, what are the chances that these five bodies are the first time our killer has acted?" His fingers dance through the air, typing a search into the national database to look for particularly violent unsolved murders.

"Low." Itachi didn't believe that for a single minute. "There's too much skill and brutality involved for this to be his first merry-go-round." No, this psychopath had practice and lots of it. "We're most likely dealing with a serial killer. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who would have loved to see Gato six feet under, so that doesn't narrow the list of suspects."

"That's what I thought." At least that could help their case somewhat. "I've put a search into the database, looking for any murders similar to this one in the country." If it was a local killer, then Shisui didn't expect to find anything out of the state. Of course, it would mean going through a lot of crime scene photos. "We'll know soon enough what their area of operation looks like." Then they could triangulate the killer's location in the middle of the hunting grounds. If they had gone international, though... that would complicate things slightly. Then again, why call in the CIA if you weren't dealing with a case fleeing overseas?

"Alright, let's break down the M.O. To kill someone with a blade, let alone five people with four of them being bodyguards, the killer would need to have significant strength or speed, likely both. They would be in their physical prime..." Shisui glances at the photos again. "Male? Women don't usually go for evisceration." They tended to prefer it clean and fast, more psychological torture than physical.

"It's more likely to be male." Itachi would concede that point, but he wouldn't rule it out. "A woman would be a much rarer suspect for a case like this, but that could be part of the reason why the killer got away with it. The bodyguards might not have viewed a woman as an intrinsic threat in the way they would have a man." Such 'polite sexism' would be an easy way to meet your Maker.

"Right...so-" Shisui blinks, rewinding the security feed and peering into the shadowy depths of the far corner. Only two of the video feeds had been cut during the murders, the ones where the killer would have been seen actually committing the crimes. This camera had been hidden up in a corner, watching the front hallway. And Shisui could just see the barest glimpse of... "Itachi!" There it was, half of a human-shaped shadow mostly obscured in the darkness at the very edge of the screen.

"Can you amplify the image?" They might have found something, if it was usable. "I think we may have found our killer."

"Yeah, give me a second..." Shisui blows up the tiny segment of the video, focusing and sharpening the image almost to crystal definition. But...something still wasn't right, there was no color to the form, and no clear lines. It was vaguely human in shape but...blurred, as if peering through a thick, dark mist. And no matter how hard Shisui tried, he just couldn't make the image any clearer. It was as if... "The killer is physically out of focus..."

"It's definitely supernatural in nature." Itachi frowns as he looks over the screen. "Nothing else could explain something like that."

"Yeah..." But what kind of supernatural could just disappear into a shadow like that? "Wait..." Shisui's eyes shoot back towards the list of supernatural creatures and meta-human types that he'd been crossing possibilities off of, his eyes scanning for a rare and unlikely suspect. Unlikely, until
he saw the video. "A shadow-walker?" That was what they were called when one didn't want to delve into the names they were given from all across the world. Entities of shadow who were not quite human, but not entirely separate either.

Finding them was hard enough, but studying them was borderline impossible. None had ever consented to have their abilities studied, and only the vaguest descriptions had ever been cobbled together regarding their non-shadow appearance. Or so Shisui learned as he pulled up a slew of speculative pieces concerning their powers, their appearance, and even their very existence. It was just such a difficult thing to prove.

He couldn't be serious. "They're so rare that the odds of one being a serial killer are slimmer than winning the lottery." Despite that, Itachi had to admit that it did make perfect sense. "Though that would be just our luck to run into the sadistic variety of the breed."

Shisui rubs his temples as he feels the seeds of an oncoming headache being sown. "Just our luck…our killer is someone that scientists are still having existential debates over." People 'knew' that they existed, but no one could ever conclusively prove it in a laboratory. Okay, well the existence of the species aside, they had someone who could walk through the shadows on their hands. How literal that was, he didn't know, but he'd be damned if he didn't find out. "Alright, let's see if we can get anything else out of the video."

He starts the video playing again in slow motion, onyx eyes staring hard into the recording as the figure moves slowly, turning away from the corner and towards the camera, slinking silently along the wall. And two misty red dots glow dimly in the darkness as the figure slips out of sight.

"Two dots." Itachi tilts his head at that. "I think those might have been some kind of reflection of their eyes." Though that was only a guess. "Assuming that's true, we don't know if that is their natural eye color or just influenced by their abilities. There's also the possibility that it just appeared red because it was caught on camera." It was so hard to say.

"True." But Shisui couldn't help but feel like there was something eerie about those eyes, if they were eyes at all. Then, the other screen beeps and he turns his attention to it, bringing up the list of unsolved violent murders committed with a blade all across the country where there was no poison, toxin, or plasma residue found in the wounds, and no trace of the killer apart from the dead body. There were quite a few, and more than Shisui expected. The first one, he tossed out because it had occurred twenty years previously, and he doubted the killer had been at it quite that long if they were only just now getting wind of him. Assuming it was a him, of course.

As he flicks through the images, Shisui comes across another that nearly makes him bend over the garbage disposal. "…Aaron Dixon, age 42, died last year on November 16th in Phoenix. He lost his wife two years ago in a home invasion. The intruder was found guilty of the wife's murder. The pattern of wounds doesn't match Gato's, but his throat was slit the same way. Just like with Gato, there were no chemical traces left behind, no murder weapon found, and no trace of the killer."

That was a far cry from the center of Chicago.

"I don't know if he's only targeting males specifically, that's chance, or we just haven't found any female victims." Itachi frowns at that though. "We still have far more questions than answers." The only thing they really knew was this man or woman was smart and they were definitely supernatural. Possibly or even likely, a shadow walker.

"Let's see…" Shisui's eyes flick over the next reports, throwing out three of them due to chemical tracing, and two because there were sketches of women suspects. "Jose Nichols, age 40, murdered three years ago in his New York law office. The security cameras caught nothing, no trace evidence left behind, and no suspects that panned out. His throat had been slit and suffered multiple
stab wounds ante-mortem. It was declared a cold case last year. And..." He clicks on another file. "In the same three days, a minor gang leader named Quantez Pope was killed in Brooklyn. Throat slit, multiple stab wounds, no trace evidence. The case was closed after a month due to 'lack of resources'." Or lack of interest in finding who knocked off a gang leader.

"All men so far." Itachi frowns at that. "Some of whom seem to be of...questionable character." There was a definite pattern here. "Perhaps a woman who had an affair with the lot of them, but that would be difficult given the geographic distribution. Perhaps someone who punishes cheaters?" The nature of the crimes was so violent. A crime of passion could explain that.

"Maybe, but..." Shisui frowns as he pulls up another file. "Marcus Goodman. He was a priest, age 56, killed in his parish church six months ago. Similar pattern of wounds to Gato's. Generally considered a good man by his parishioners, his death came as a shock to his community in South Carolina." Shisui couldn't really make heads or tails of that one. He wasn't a religious man by any means, but even he found it kind of wrong to kill a priest. Gato and the gang leader aside, some of these profiles looked like good, ordinary people. And then there were some that didn't, which explained why those cases were closed more quickly and seemed to have slipped under the radar.

"These cases go back about...four years, it seems." That did tilt them towards a younger perpetrator, if the anger and violence hadn't done that already.

Itachi resists the impulse to weigh in on such matters in detail. "Even good men in public, might not be so good in private." That much was obvious from his work in the CIA. "Their occupation has little to do with that fact."

"He was also openly gay." Which Shisui found odd as he scrolled down the profile. While there were certainly gay priests, they were in the minority as far as statistics went.

"Aren't priests supposed to be celibate?" Itachi didn't know why that would matter much. "Never mind. I doubt their sexual orientation had much to do with it. I imagine the other victims included some heterosexual people?"

"Well, being celibate doesn't mean you can't look. But as far as I can tell..." Shisui runs through a few of the profiles, looking at marital status in particular. Some he continued to toss out, based on characteristics that deviated greatly from the pattern, but there were still dozens of profiles that made the cut. "It seems to be all across the spectrum, so-" He blinks, hitting on something he hadn't expected to find. "Rosanna Cabrera, age 37. Less severe ante-mortem injuries, suffered a clean cut to the throat. Murdered in the middle of a diplomatic forum a year and a half ago in Los Angeles. She was the ambassador from Colombia." He clicks on the profile immediately after that. "At the same forum, one of the senators from California was murdered, though with slightly more severe injuries than Cabrera."

"So it's not just men then." Itachi shakes his head. The pattern truly made no sense. "She was either a one off or he's got more female victims. I can't really think of anything these people have in common other than their age to some degree."

"And even that is iffy..." Shisui couldn't see any connection between them at all. And that one... "Wait..." The ambassador was foreign, so maybe he had to widen his search. He begins typing furiously, widening the search area and narrowing the parameters slightly to accommodate for the physical evidence, or lack thereof. New profiles begin popping up on the screen from Interpol databases, giving locations such as London, Beijing, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Botoga, Montreal, Paris, Frankfurt...the list went on for miles. "...Shit."

Itachi watches with growing alarm. This wasn't good. They'd be damn lucky not to get Interpol involved on this one. Oh well, there was nothing for it. They had a killer to track down.
It was almost time…almost time… And Sasuke was sure to keep his thoughts masked and private. You never knew if there was a psychic about, and no falsely legitimate criminal would be caught dead without one in the employ. Catching them alive and making them dead, however, was a possibility that Sasuke was greatly looking forward to tonight.

He’d only just gotten back from Chicago last night, and already, he felt the cold rush of rage through his veins. Finally, the less personal half of his greatest crusade would lie dead at his feet. Tonight, the man who made all of the cruel, twisted experiments possible was going to die screaming. Well, until his throat filled up with his own blood.

None could lay eyes on him as he walked alone through the cold darkness of the lavish hotel's secret shadows. None would ever see him. At most, all they would see was a shadow with glowing ruby eyes. And to those ruby eyes, the prize was already in sight. The penthouse was frighteningly easy to infiltrate. At least for him.

Gaara hadn't protested this part of the vendetta. The vampire knew what it meant to Sasuke to wipe out all traces of those horrific years he spent under Orochimaru's 'care'. And this man was just one more step on the way to freedom.

At least…so Sasuke had once hoped.

The study stood just ahead.

Danzo sat calmly in the borrowed study. Idly, he sips on some expensive wine. It was actually older than him by a considerable margin. "A good year." He swallows another gulp of the blood red liquid, unaware that it would be his last drink as he looks over various business papers.

His bodyguard, Gozu, stands at attention in the corner of the room. It was a formality for the most part, but the man took his job seriously. If he didn't… Those consequences were not pleasant to think about. His brother Mezu, standing on the other side of the room, was the psychic in Danzo's employ. Together, the two of them saw to Danzo's security. As soon as Mezu sensed a threat, Gozu would be on them before they could blink.

Mezu was hardly the most powerful psychic, however. Something about Danzo's paranoia regarding the leaking of information. But still, Gozu felt as though something was different tonight. A…dark aura that he couldn't quite put his own weakly psychic finger on.

So he looks to his brother, frowning slightly. "Mezu, can you-" His eyes widen as a long, silvery blade is withdrawn from Mezu's chest and slices across his throat, dropping his brother to the ground in the midst of a dark shadow. "Mezu!"

Danzo was enjoying his wine one minute and the next his bodyguard was screaming. "What the Hell is going on here?" Not something that he was accustomed too. Few people were foolish enough to attack him and even fewer posed any serious threat to the brothers that guarded him.
In an instant, Gozu is given the same treatment, the living shadow moving across the room and plunging its blade into the man's heart before he can do more than lift a finger in his own defense. His throat splits open, pouring crimson blood across the formerly pristine floor as the shadow pauses in the middle of the room, red eyes turned on his true target.

"Danzo." The soft voice wavers slightly, accompanied by the faint sound of crackling static.

"What kind of demon are you?!" There was no way that a normal man could best both of them. "What do you want and how do I know you?" The owner of that voice could have been anyone but they also intended to be his assassin.

"A demon…?" A faint smile plays at the man's lips as the shadows begin to solidify. He had long since cut the security feed, and they wouldn't be able to get it up again for at least fifteen minutes, even if they had the best computer techs the government had to offer at their disposal. Sasuke could afford to make this count. "Yes…you did call me that the first time we met. One of the snake's little pet demons." He solidifies into a smoky, but recognizable form. At least, recognizable as human in shape. In bearing, that was another matter entirely. Ruby eyes glow with bloodlust and fury, the mask pulled up over his mouth and nose concealing the tiny smile.

That explained it. "If you're here to extract some kind of revenge, you won't get far." Danzo raises to his feet. So that's what this is. "I'll allow you to leave with money to start over. A thousand lifetimes worth of it." He could be bought off. "Is that not worth more than a few minutes of pleasure? If I didn't finance his experiments, someone else would have."

Sasuke's eyes narrow at the man…not quite pleading for his life, but attempting to buy him off nonetheless. Was he serious? Did he think this was a joke? "I have no need, no desire for your blood money. There are no riches in the world that can make up for what was done to them." To him. "I listened…every time one of us was murdered, I listened to their screams. I listened to their screams after they died, and I heard of every cruel and depraved thing that snake did." Everything…"…Only three of us survived." And with Haku's death…"I'm the only one left, now." The only one left to finally carry out the revenge of dozens of murdered children.

"If that's true, then do you really wish to throw your life away this easily?" There was still time. "Your life will be meaningless if you kill me because no one will survive doing so. Even if you take my life, I have... connections. You'll be caught."

A wry smile touches Sasuke's lips, and on impulse, he pulls the mask down. He wanted his face to be the last thing Danzo saw. "You think I care? After you, there's only one person left. Once he's dead, I don't care what happens to me. My life has been one long nightmare." Ever since the day he fell into Orochimaru's grasp, Sasuke had wished a million times that he'd died a long time ago. "I hope you remember my face, at least." He tilts his head, a cruel light blossoming in his eyes. "You and the snake always did agree that I was one of the pretty ones."

"Your pretty face won't save you." Danzo pulls out a gun from his pocket and starts shooting. "It's a shame that your life head to end in such a meaningless fashion, but Orochimaru was always careless when it came to his pets."

Sasuke was gone as soon as the trigger was pulled, already fading into the darkness as soon as Danzo's elbow twitched. The bullets slam into the doorframe, hitting nothing but air and metal as Sasuke's gloved fingers clasp around Danzo's wrist and break it, forcing the elderly man to drop the gun. "And here I'd given you the opportunity to know who killed you." His blade stabs through Danzo's shoulder as he forces the old man down against the desk. "Do you remember, Danzo? Do you remember the name of Orochimaru's favorite 'pet'?"
"The Uchiha boy, I take it." He looks at him. "It does explain why you're a little demon." The entire Clan was cursed in his opinion. "Die! Damn you!" He had been about to pull the trigger again, but the gun was already gone, clattering across the desk and onto the floor.

"Yes..." It was a name he never used anymore. It held far too many painful memories. Memories of being abandoned, of being left with the snake, of the torture that came with it. "Apparently, the Uchiha family is full of psychics. But I'm not just an Uchiha, now am I?" The blade digs deeper into Danzo's shoulder, biting into the traditional polished wood desk. "...What is my name?" He wanted to hear it spoken with fear. Or at the very least, anger.

"Sasuke." Danzo tries to free himself. "Though you might as well change it to Dead. YOU'RE DEAD!" He makes one last furious attempt to save himself from the demon of vengeance that was staring at him.

Sasuke growls darkly, holding the man down firmly against the desk. "I think you might be mistaken. But I'm sure that your ghost will see that after I've cut you apart."

He had ten minutes left, and he was going to make every second count.

More blood. There always seemed to be more blood on Sasuke's hands. He chose this path, he knew it. But sometimes...he almost wondered if there really could be something different for him. Something happy. A foolish notion, he was sure. But sometimes it helped to take the emptiness and lock it away. Just for a little while. And it was the view of this sunrise, when twilight fades and gives rise to a splay of red and orange and purple and blue, that gave him such foolish notions. A view that would have been difficult two hundred years ago before the air had been returned to a crystal clear state.

If he fell from this height, nothing could save him. The tower that rose up over the city made the streets look like threads, and the people were barely visible, even to his sharp eyes. That's why he liked sitting up here. It reminded him that he was human, and that humans faced their own mortality every day. Of course, he couldn't die. Not yet, anyway. He still had one more part to this crusade, and then...he would go wherever the wind took him, he supposed.

Gaara appears next to Sasuke. "I knew you'd come here." It was his favorite place in the entire city, after all. "He's dead. Isn't he?" He had to be, but Gaara wanted confirmation. "Did it make you happy?"

"One of them is dead." But not both. And Sasuke couldn't die until he'd killed Orochimaru as well. He sighs, closing his eyes against the rising sun. "I feel...like I can almost see the end of this dark tunnel." He didn't expect to just walk out into the light, far from it, but...he needed this fourteen year long nightmare to finally end. After that...he would probably just keep doing what he was doing already. Listen to the spirits and carry out their wishes. What else could he really do? His mission was everything.

Gaara sighs as he embraces him. "It's a start." Hopefully, Sasuke would see reason, but he doubted it. He felt like a broken record.

Sasuke's eyes flutter open, the void inside subsiding just a little. It was hard...when everything inside of him screamed with a dull, throbbing ache. Almost out of instinct, his fingers go to the place on his arm where the petals swirled across his skin. But it was fruitless. It was probably a good thing that he hadn't ever felt anything. It meant that the one on the other side of the tattoo was probably on the other side of the planet. That, or the claim that you could feel your other half's emotions was bogus. Then again, Sasuke usually dampened his own emotions as much as he
could, especially his rage, so maybe it was a psychic thing. Maybe they didn't know he existed. It would be better that way…

He sighs, leaning into Gaara's embrace. "It's not your fault, you know. There's nothing you can do…I was broken before you ever met me."

"I won't lecture you again." Sasuke wouldn't listen anyway. "You already know my opinion on the matter." As much as it stilled pained Gaara, you couldn't choose another's fate for them.

"I know, and…" Sasuke takes a deep breath, closing his eyes once more, the pain inside him easing only slightly. "Thank you…for caring what happens to me." Very few did, but Sasuke had been on this path for a long time now. And as far as he could see, there was no getting him off of it.

"Itachi?" Shisui frowns as he takes in the expression on his cousin's face. "Are you alright?" They were both early risers, though Itachi's habit was by choice, unlike Shisui who loathed getting up at the crack of dawn to get ready for work. But still, the startled, pained expression on Itachi's face was unexpected, to say the least. Though Shisui would personally deem it shocking, since he hadn't seen that expression on Itachi's face in over eight years. Not since the days when Itachi was still mastering his gifts.

Lying was something that Itachi was gifted at. "Yes, I'm fine." Which was really one of the main reasons why he made such an excellent CIA agent, but this was Shisui. Itachi gave it at best a 50-50 that Shisui wouldn't see through his facade.

The elder Uchiha rolls his eyes. "Nice try, Itachi." Itachi would need a better bullshit face than that if he thought about lying to the best friend he'd ever had. "…Seriously, what's going on? Is this about the case? You look like you're about to cry. Or scream." Or both, and that's what worried Shisui the most. His cousin had an amazing poker face, but still…the little things were there. The furrowed brow, the panic in his dark eyes, the tiny wrinkle that said he was biting the inside of his lip, and the clenched fist partly hidden by a long sleeve.

"Well, mostly that I have a nosy cousin who doesn't know when to quit." He forces himself to chuckle. There was nothing that could be done about this feeling. "I suppose that might be what's wrong." He had no idea where the emotions were coming from. Just that they were powerful. "I can feel someone's thoughts and they're in agony, but I don't know where they are." He shrugs, hoping Shisui would drop the matter.

Okay, that raised more than a few red flags for Shisui. "You don't know where they are?" Itachi's range was pretty big, it set the record for the reach of telepaths at five kilometers. And even then, his cousin was usually good at either blocking them out, or pinpointing their location. "Not even a direction or a distance?" And they were in agony? "Should we be placing a call to the police?"

They said there was no such thing as a dumb question, but Shisui had just proved whoever they were...wrong. That was a lot of dumb questions and in rapid succession. Itachi sighs and resists the impulse to roll his eyes. "Nothing." The last one was a legitimate question though. "They're not in physical pain. It's an emotional one and again, I have no idea where they are."

That…didn't make any sense. Shisui rubs his temples, trying to think of an explanation. If Itachi was getting a reading from so far away that he couldn't pinpoint the location, or even the direction, then it meant that it was coming from well outside his usual range of telepathy. But if that was the case, then there's no way he should be able to pick up the mental signal at all. "What the hell is going on here…?" It wasn't as if emotions could be broadcast across the planet. Not without a very long relay of telepaths, anyway. The furthest known distance of telepathic or empathic
transmission was… "A hundred and fifty miles…"

A hundred and fifty miles? That couldn't be possible. How could Shisui even tell at that range? "You're not serious." Itachi pours himself a drink. "That's too far and how could you even tell at such a distance?" Shisui was good, but he wasn't a God.

"Ah, no, that's not what I meant." Well, it sort of was, but Shisui's inner musings had slipped out half-formed. "I meant that the record for the transmission of emotions is set at a hundred and fifty miles. Neither party involved was a telepath, but…there is another way to transmit emotion over vast distances between two compatible people."

Oh, now Itachi saw where Shisui was going with this. That made more sense. "I was going to say, I didn't think anyone could sense emotions that far away." Over a hundred miles was almost unheard of and certainly never done alone. "Your romantic nature is both amusing and a little disturbing. I doubt that's it, Shisui." If that was the case, soul mates would find each other much easier.

"You really don't think so?" Shisui found the idea quite appealing. Once you got within sensing range of your soulmate, you would be drawn right to them. Assuming that they were expressing strong emotions, of course. Those stories always did stress that part. Without the powerful emotions involved, there just wouldn't be a strong enough signal to bring your soulmate to you. "I mean, what's the harm in trying to find out?"

"You mean what's the harm of going up to a complete stranger who is in extreme distress?" Itachi gives him a look of disbelief. "You really have to ask that question?"

Shisui rolls his eyes. "Staying away will keep you strangers, and if they're in distress, then isn't that part of the problem that needs solving?" Why was it so hard to understand? Sure, he knew that Itachi was a skeptic, but still, if someone is hurting, then it was important to help them out before something even worse happened. "Didn't we join the CIA to help solve problems?"

Itachi groans as he rubs his temples. He knew what was coming. "That may be true and I know you want to help someone in need, but mostly you're just being nosy." His cousin would like nothing more than to meddle in his love life. "Still, I suppose we should investigate. Otherwise you'll never let the matter rest."

"Good, and in the meantime…” Shisui flips their intelligence disc into the air, catching it again easily. "We've got a serial killer to find. Preferably before anyone else ends up dead."

But it was already too late for that.

When the two of them arrived at the office, it was busy, to say the least. The kind of energy in the air only ever happened when a case became extremely high profile. And Shisui noticed that at lot of people were glancing at them, trying to be discreet, but being more than a little obvious about it anyway. "…Something's happened." Was it the case? Had the killer been caught already?

Obviously, something had happened. Itachi didn't know why he felt so sarcastic today. Maybe he was just annoyed with his well-intentioned cousin's meddling. Maybe it was the throbbing in his head from the emotional exposure he had endured only moments before. He wasn't sure. All he knew was that the stating of the obvious was getting annoying.

"Let's see what happened." He sighs as he drags Shisui behind him and heads to Jiraiya's office. "What did we miss?" Clearly, it had been something of vital importance.

"You're going to Canada." Jiraiya didn't miss a beat, having expected these two in his office ever
since the news broke and the chatter began. "The killer struck again, and the higher ups are putting extra funds into this case to make sure that it's solved quickly and decisively. They agreed to let the two of you keep the lead on it, but you're also being given access to our assets across the border, as well as the ability to requisition help from any department or agent you see fit."

This was serious then. It wasn't often that international groups would work like this. "Very well." He glances at Shisui. "It's a good thing that you like maple syrup and Canadian bacon, I suppose."

"No kidding. Though our bacon is still better." Shisui certainly appreciated Canadian bacon, though, especially on sandwiches. "Who was the killer's last target?"

Jiraiya frowns grimly. "Danzo Shimura, international businessman with dual Japanese and American citizenship. He had friends in high places who want to see his killer brought to justice. An arrest is preferred, but not necessary. You've been given full sanction to use whatever measures you must to stop them from killing again."

"I almost want to send him a thank you card." Itachi barely refrains from clucking his tongue in disapproval. "Danzo cleans up his tracks well, but I know enough to realize the world is better off without him. Be that as it may, this killer doesn't seem to discriminate when it comes to upstanding citizens and monsters." He had to be stopped.

"Don't let the higher ups hear you say that." Not that Jiraiya could disagree, but... he rather liked the young Uchiha, and would rather see him keep this job. More cases got solved with him right where he was. "Shimura was killed in Toronto. It's one of the few places that pops up routinely in the files you sent last night, so it might be a good place to start. Itachi, I want you to try and get a read of Shimura's hotel room. It should be fresh enough for you to get something, at least."

"Right, I'll be sure to be thorough." Itachi nods at him, then gestures for Shisui to follow him.

Shisui ambles along behind his cousin, mulling over the new information in his mind. The latest victim... had little, if nothing to do with most of the other victims. Innocents and monsters alike... mostly male, a few female, the men were treated worse than the women, and some were treated particularly badly. Judging by the size of some of the victims, along with the wound patterns, they were definitely dealing with a male, and not one of little strength. It would have been difficult to overpower some of the victims, even if he'd snuck up on them. Probably on the younger side, between twenty and thirty-five, and the killer was a shadow-walker with red eyes who was accustomed to wielding blades. A fairly specific criteria, but difficult to verify.

"Looks like looking for your magnolia is going to have to wait." A pity, since Shisui was looking forward to teasing Itachi relentlessly about it. Now, it was all business. "I'll grab all of the files we need from the databases here, book our flight, and talk to a few of the other agents about anything they might have heard. You head home and get our bags packed as quickly as you can. We can brainstorm on the way there."

"Yes, tracking down murders does supersede your need for amusement." Itachi grimaces as the two of them walk to the elevator. "Luckily, I always keep a suitcase packed and my passport ready for such an occasion." It was fairly rare, but the younger Uchiha had done a handful of assignments outside of the U.S. before.

"Perfect, mine is under my bed, and my passport is in my sock drawer." Shisui smiles determinedly at his cousin. "Just think, this will be our biggest collar ever." People talked sometimes about the cases that made careers. For the two of them, this might just be the one.

"Possibly." Itachi shrugs at that. He didn't feel much joy in it. "Hard to feel pleased with myself for
bringing in someone who took out a monster like Danzo, but I suppose it takes a monster to kill another." It didn't matter though. A job was a job. "In any case, perhaps we'll catch a hockey game or something while we're there."

Ah…the great Canadian national sport. Shisui would definitely look forward to that part of the assignment. Even after almost four hundred years, the sport just wouldn't die. "I wonder if the killer likes hockey." If he did, then maybe they really could squeeze in a game.

"I'm not sure." Itachi sighs as he looks out the window nearest the elevator. "If he does, he's likely to bash someone's skull in with the stick though." Now that would be a rather unfortunate occurrence, but not the first time it had happened. Though he was not hoping to have a laughingstock made of this case by having the killer strike at a hockey game. That would just be in poor taste.

"Well, maybe the killer will respect the sanctity of Canada's favorite game." Not that Shisui thought that the killer respected the sanctity of anything, really. After all, he did kill that priest and a mourning widower. But who knew, really?

What he did know was that they were catching the eleven-thirty flight to Pearson International Airport.

Chapter End Notes

See why I added all the murder tags now? - C
A Punk Tends the Bar

Chapter by celestia193

Chapter Notes

celestia193's Author's Note: Okay, so who other than me thinks that Sasuke would look REALLY good in leather? Anybody? What am I saying? Everyone loves Sasuke in leather! Especially Temari who likes playing dress-up with her human. I am channeling my inner Temari. I'm also going to start making fun of Americans through Canadian eyes (because I am a loud and proud Canadian) and there's going to be a lot of jokes, stereotypes, and blatant references to Canadian culture that are either very true, or that Americans sometimes get hilariously wrong (like, where did the whole living in igloos and riding polar bears thing even come from?). Enjoy.

Also, something to keep in mind is that in Itachi's eyes, Sasuke is named Alex, and he will thus refer to him as such in both dialogue and thought. So whenever you see the name Alex, it means that Itachi (or Shisui/minor characters) are thinking of him as his public persona because they don't know his real name. That's going to start happening a lot for the next...7 or so chapters.

"How did I let your brother talk me into this again?" Sasuke shakes his head as he scrutinizes the image of himself in leather pants, biker boots, a blue cotton v-necked t-shirt, and a tight jet-black leather jacket. "This is insane. I hope that he realizes that." Who the hell wanted to hire a serial killer to tend the bar on a full-time basis? Sure, Sasuke had picked up more than a few tricks here and there and knew the entire menu by heart, but that didn't mean he was a great choice for doing it on a nightly basis.

For some reason, Gaara's alternative to a lecture had been to inform Sasuke that he was to tend the bar tonight, tomorrow night, and every night for the coming week, or two, or three while he worked out a plan to take out Orochimaru. That also apparently included setting Temari on him and a lot more leather, temporary electric blue streaks, and winged eyeliner around the amber contacts than he was entirely comfortable with.

Temari smiles at him. She knew Sasuke would be difficult, but that wouldn't stop her. "At least this way, no one will recognize you." Hell, she barely recognized him. "Besides, I think you can handle serving some drinks much better than what you usually do."

Sasuke rolls his eyes playfully. "I don't know...I'm pretty good at killing people." But of course a bunch of vampires wouldn't be phased at all by that. "The regulars will know who I am, though." There was no getting around that. But at least some punk-style bartender wouldn't draw much attention in a club like this one. Not from anyone but the coeds, he'd bet.

The blonde was tempted to smack him upside the head. Actually, on second though there was no reason for restraint.

SMACK! "You're being difficult for the sake of being difficult." She knew he had suffered, but why he he insisted on playing the part of the martyr was beyond her. "They won't recognize you. I'm insulted that you think so little of my abilities. Things would be better, if you just let them get
better." Gaara had tried to reason with him, but it hadn't worked. Temari wasn't above getting out her fan and hurling a windstorm below the belt to smack some sense into him.

"Okay! Okay!" Sasuke wanted to point out that they would recognize his name and voice at least, if not his face. But he really didn't feel like getting smacked by the crazy vampiress again. "Yes, alright, you did a great job." He was…hot, he guessed. Very punk, not quite goth, not too different from his usual clothing choices, if…a bit tighter than he was used to. "…When the girls hit on me tonight, I'm blaming you." There was no question of if.

"They'd hit on you if you were wearing a paper bag." Temari rolls her eyes. "You must be gay. Otherwise why would you be so upset about women hitting on you? If you're into men, that's not a bad thing."

Sasuke sighs softly, quickly feeling that they were broaching unpleasant territory. "…I'd rather not have anyone hit on me, to be honest. Women annoy me and men freak me out. But that's why I have you to rescue me, right?"

"Yes, I suppose that's true." She sighs dramatically as she places her hand on her heart. "What a drag as my bloodmate would say." Maybe someday, he'd get that massive pole shoved up his exceptionally well shaped posterior pulled out. "Just try not to kill anyone." Today was not that day though. "They're just intoxicated coeds mostly."

A rolling wave of quiet laughter spills from Sasuke, a rare enough occurrence, but genuine when it did happen. "I think I can manage not to pull a sword out from under the bar tonight. I'm there to make sure that the coeds don't do something to get themselves killed, remember?" He considered it a bartender's duty to make sure that the patrons didn't come in just to get drunk and go off to get themselves hurt, or worse. "But electric blue? Really?" It went really well with his dark hair, sure…but it was still a pretty attention-grabbing color.

Temari wasn't really so sure about that. Sasuke's temper was even worse than Gaara's when he had been a Ripper and no, Temari wasn't exaggerating. "It looks good on you and I felt creative." She shrugs. "I could dye it pink next time if you prefer." It would serve him right.

Sasuke's ivory face pales to a milky white. "…No, I'm perfectly happy with blue." He could handle a lot of ego-bruising treatment, but he would NEVER live down pink hair. Gaara would make sure of that. "You did a great job, and if you want to put colors in my hair, I much prefer this one." Because heavens forbid she put pink in his hair. Or green. Or yellow. Or orange… The thought of orange hair makes Sasuke shiver.

Good. The vampire lookalike had finally learned some respect. Hmpf. "Good." She smirks. "Have fun bartending." With that being said, Temari saunters off. Leaving Sasuke to fend for himself against the horde of semi intoxicated college girls who were quite fine with electric blue hair. Thank you, very much.

Muttering some very unflattering things under his breath, Sasuke steps out from the back room and strides past a few early arrivals to open the automatic gate that allowed access to the bar. He steps behind the shining counter-top and turns towards the liquor shelf, pulling down the appropriate bottles. Schnapps and Vodka were a must, and there always had to be whiskey available. It would be an insult to Gaara's heritage not to have whiskey available at all times.

Once the bottles are aligned, he turns back to face the rest of the club and takes a deep breath. "The bar's open!" normally, he preferred to keep his voice low, but in a place as noisy as this one, there was just nothing for it but to be louder than the ruckus.
This was going to be a long night…

You had to be kidding…of all the reasons to not be able to show up… "Yes, I see. Thank you for your time."

Shisui sighs as he ends the call, shaking his head as he returns to the study, which he and Itachi had commandeered as the center of their operations. "The station just called back and said that the detective in charge of the case can't make it tonight. We'll have to wait until tomorrow afternoon before we can see the crime scene."

"Why can't they make it?" Itachi raises an eyebrow. "Shouldn't finding Danzo's killer be top priority?" Even if the bastard did deserve to die?

"Well..." Shisui shakes his head, an amused and impatient huff escaping his lips. "Apparently, the detective working the case is hosting their kid's birthday party tonight, and it's already in full swing. It includes a sleepover, and he's a single dad, so there's no one that can take over for him tonight. Plus, since it's a special occasion..." The department hadn't wanted to push for it since the detective had booked this night off months ago.

He snorts in amusement. The irony was rather poetic. While Danzo's funeral was being planned, some kid was having their birthday party. "Seems like a legitimate reason to me." He smirks.

"Yeah, just because one asshole dies, it doesn't mean the world stops spinning." And though it was frustrating, Shisui would let it go for the sake of a kid's birthday party. "So, that means we're free to do whatever we want tonight. I thought that maybe we should scope out the city, see what the feel is like around here." Not that he was expecting to run into the killer on the streets, but getting a sense of the ebb and flow of a city would help them to spot any discrepancies that could lead them to their man.

"That is the most roundabout way to say you want to get wasted that I have ever heard." Itachi chuckles at that and shakes his head. "Well, seeing as we have time to kill, I don't see why not." After all, you only lived once.

"Yes!" Usually, it was nearly impossible to get Itachi to agree to go out. But today, Shisui had won the victory. "Alright, let me do a search and find out where the best supernatural nightclubs are." He pulls out his communicator, tapping the tiny metal square to let it bloom like a flower, revealing the holographic keyboard. The search was quick and easy, and half a dozen locations came up within three kilometers of their location alone. "Okay, we've got several options pretty close by...The Bleeding Heart, Wolf's Tale, something in...Korean, I think...oh, no, not that one." Shisui flicks by the fourth and fifth ones, tossing them out. "And...Onyx. It's a bit smaller, but the reviews look good."

"Onyx sounds better." He knew one thing without a doubt, he was going to regret this. "Smaller is good for my eardrums." Itachi had always had exceptionally good hearing. He wasn't entirely sure if it was or wasn't supernaturally enhanced, but either way...loud noises weren't his friend.

"Alright, Onyx it is!" Shisui grins as he ushers Itachi towards the door, grabbing their jackets on the way out. It may have been only September, but it was still on the cool side north of the border. "Let's see..." He brings up a page about the club as he coaxes Itachi out the door. "Says here that the club itself is over a hundred and fifty years old. Apparently, it's run by a vampire and supposed to be a safe haven for supernaturals and metahumans, and a gentle introduction to them for regular humans. Vampires can also get a bite to eat there, as long as they abide by the standards rules of consent and moderation, with an absolute rule against compulsion, lest you risk a stake to the
That was detailed. Also a bit on the exotic side. "Well, it might be an experience." Under circumstances like that who could resist getting that close up to vampires and getting a glimpse into their mind as they fed? "Let's try it." Alright maybe, Itachi had a minor biting fetish too. Still it was MOSTLY in the name of science.

Shisui smirks, picking up on his cousin's excitement easily with his empathic abilities. Thoughts were hard for him, unlike for Itachi, who could get the specifics, but the nuances of emotion were much easier for Shisui to read, especially when he was trying. "Careful that you don't get yourself in too deep, Cousin. I've heard that vampires can get awfully territorial around their humans."

"..." That was such an invasion of privacy. "I was only possibly going to explore it once." He shrugs. "As if you've never wanted to get closer to other supernaturals and see what the differences are. Purely an intellectual exercise."

"Right. Well, don't let a vampire suck you dry 'Tachi." Shisui grins as he claps his cousin on the back. "I'm hoping that there might be a fairy or two there. Apparently, their dust can mimic the effects of LSD." Just without some of the harmful side-effects.

"You're lecturing me about vampires when you're hoping to get high on fairy dust." Itachi scoffs at that. Honestly, he was such a hypocrite. "I doubt that it actually does anything more than make people giggle when it's not applied in a battle context."

"Well, at least my choice is a bit less lethal." He turns them down an adjacent street, where the crowds got a fair bit thicker. The lights flashing from some of the buildings made it pretty clear that in this neighborhood, this was the street where the nightlife could be found. "Alright, the map says that the club should be just past the next crosswalk."

"I wouldn't underestimate fairies." There had to be a reason why they were on every continent. "There are very few species that can survive and even thrive in Antarctica."

"Hm…I wonder if they go penguin sledding…" Shisui loses his train of thought a little at the idea of fairies riding penguins down slippery snow-clad slopes. "Parts of Canada are close enough to being Antarctica, so maybe we can find some here…"

If he didn't know any better, Itachi would wonder if Shisui had already gotten in to the pixie dust. "Right." He shakes his head as they arrive at the doors to the club and wait in line to be let in.

At the front door, as the line grew ever smaller, either through people getting in or being tossed out of line, Shisui spotted a rather attractive blond woman. She wasn't imposing, really, not overtly. But there was just something about her that was…really hot. And dangerous. Very dangerous…

When the line finally thins enough for him to step up to the lady bouncer at the door, Shisui smiles widely. "Hey there, my cousin and I are looking to have some fun tonight. We just moved here and heard that this was a good place to find a party that won't blow out poor 'Tachi's ears. That true?"

Well, if she didn't already have Shikamaru, Temari would have been more than willing to show them quite a bit of fun. "That's true." She smiles fang-tastically at them. "My brother keeps the music at levels safe for supernatural hearing." Still, Shikamaru knew enough not to get jealous of feeding. Maybe they were feeders.

A vampire for a bouncer? He hadn't seen that coming. Shisui raises an eyebrow, then a mischievous grin splits his face. "Well, well, Itachi, maybe you can get started on that 'research' of
yours pretty soon, hm?"

Itachi feels his cheeks burn a bit at that. "Perhaps, but I wouldn't go getting any ideas." His eyes travel to the ring on Temari's finger. "She's already taken, Shisui."

"Oh?" Shisui's grin widens as Itachi falls right into the trap. "I thought you said it was purely an intellectual exercise? Did I hear that wrong?" Teasing his cousin was just so much fun.

"It is, but I was talking about you." He rolls his eyes at Shisui. "I know that you've always had a thing for blondes."

"True, but as you can see, she's taken, and I'm not a homewrecker." Like Shisui was going to fall for that. "But alright, if you'd rather not go through with your intellectual exercise, then let's go search for a fairy." He winks at the lady bouncer as he flashes her his ID.

She shakes her head and examines it. "ID is good." Temari pauses for a moment. "Though there are only a handful of fairies that are brave enough to come to the club. They know it's run by my family and we're vampires."

"Then a brave fairy it is." Shisui slips into the club, temporarily assaulted by a sudden wave of light and sound. Not excruciating, of course, but it was still a club, and that meant music and dancing and flashing lights everywhere. Everywhere but the bar, anyway. Still, one thing was certain. "I already love this place." It felt so…alive here. The emotions were running high, and Shisui was already feeling his own spirits lift just from their proximity to the dancing crowd.

Itachi shakes his head in amusement as he follows Shisui. Well, maybe it would do him some good to be out and about. Before they started really looking for the psychopath.

Shisui weaves his way through some of the dancing patrons, approaching the bar for a first drink. After all, no one came to a nightclub to stay completely sober. "Can I get…" He glances quickly at the menu, memorizing it in an instant. And one in particular caught his eye. "A Maple vodka cooler?"

He quietly follows his cousin towards a gorgeous bartender with unnaturally colored hair. Unnatural, but quite flattering on him.

The amber-eyed bartender nods, flipping a shaker through the air and pouring out a couple of ruby red cocktails. Pale fingers move quickly across the bar, flipping ice and drinks through the air and landing each one perfectly. Drinks and a show were apparently on the menu tonight.

The elder psychic watches, completely mesmerized by the young bartender. He couldn't be older than…what, twenty-three? Twenty-four, maybe? Those were some impressive skills. "Where did you train? You're incredible."

The bartender glances at Shisui a moment, before turning his eyes back on the drinks, a faint smile on his lips. "I trained here. I watched the old bartender and picked up some tricks, then taught myself how to make everything on the menu."

"Well you're a fantastic study." Itachi smiles at him. "I couldn't top that."

A soft, lilting laugh passes pale lips. "And that's why I'm out here instead of the regular bartender. Apparently, I learn quickly enough that I'm more than qualified to take over bar-tending full-time." Deft fingers reach for the vodka and maple syrup, twirling the bottles around and mixing the clear and dark liquids together over a shock of ice cubes. With a squeeze of lemon and a touch of vanilla syrup, he hands slides the crystal glass across the bar. "There you go. Diabetes in a cup."
Shisui snickers as he takes his drink. "I'll keep that in mind when I come ordering my next drink." Well, wasn't he a sassy little sweetheart. Shisui could tell that much, this guy really seemed to care about the health and welfare of the patrons. "Alright, Itachi, I've got some fairies to find."

"Alright." He nods at Shisui. "I'm sure you'll come back much better versed in the way of fairies than you were before."

Shisui chuckles good-naturedly, taking a sip of his drink as he slips off into the crowd. Amber eyes follow him as he disappears towards the lounge area. "...Your friend is going to get high on pixie dust, isn't he?"

"Most likely." Itachi couldn't help, but laugh. "Sex on the beach for me and if people do such a thing...he will."

"Got it." Without batting an eye at the order, he makes a mental note to keep an eye on the enthusiastic one. Still, he picks up the schnapps and reaches for the cranberry juice, tossing the Schnapps into the air as he pulls out a glass. "If nothing else, it's a safer high than most other substances." He slices open an orange, squeezing out the juice into the shaker with the cranberry and peach and spins it around a few times before pouring it out over ice with the vodka. In goes the straw and a slice of orange before handing it over to the less...enthusiastic one. "There you go, your Sex on the Beach."

"I imagine the other patrons are disappointed that you're not offering that in another context." He chuckles as he begins enjoying his beverage.

Pausing, Sasuke glances at the newest addition to the bar, shifting unconsciously as he tries to get the measure of him. "Yeah, I'm sure they are, though more than a few still like to try."

"I'm sure." He smiles as he takes another sip of his drink. "Don't worry, I'm not depraved enough to jump someone who isn't interested."

Sasuke visibly relaxes, a smile returning to his face. "Good, because I think that Temari would have a few...words with you if you were. She's the vampiress you passed on your way in."

"If you expect me to believe she's your lover, I don't." He finishes his drink and smiles. "Though I won't give up your little charade."

Sasuke frowns. "...I...never said anything about her pretending to be my lover." He'd just said that she'd have words with him. "...But you knew..." Sasuke's gaze sharpens as he scrutinizes Itachi.

"You're gay." He shrugs. "Easiest trick in the book when a gay man doesn't want attention is to pretend to be straight with a female friend."

...He'd never said he was gay either. Which...wasn't really the most accurate definition anyway, but Sasuke could contest that later. "And just how do you figure that?" It's not like he actually showed interest in any of the patrons.

"Those electric blue highlights aren't something a straight man would get." Itachi smiles at him serenely.

Sasuke's gaze narrows in an instant. "I'll have you know, I was threatened with pink if I didn't allow blue." And highlights did NOT mean he was gay. "Maybe punk isn't a thing where you come from, but it still is here, so don't assume that I prefer men based on my hair, which I didn't even get a say in." Even if he had been gay, men turned him off too much for him to consider sleeping with one. Not that women turned him on, but still...
"Relax, gay or straight doesn't matter." He shakes his head in amusement as he watches the hissing bartender that reminds him all to much of a cornered ally cat. "You're not interested and I'm not really looking anyway."

"Oh." That was unexpected, to say the least. Sasuke's eyes flick down to the man's hands. No ring. "...A stark contrast to your fairy-hunting friend, then?" Strange, a man who looked like that would have no trouble finding company for the night if he wanted, and he was composed enough that finding a partner wouldn't be difficult either. "What are you here for, then? Come to see the supernaturals at play." He rolls his eyes. "Or at work..."

"Recreation." Itachi didn't see a point in lying. "My cousin and I got an assignment here and it doesn't start till tomorrow. So we're enjoying our first night in Canada." As long as he didn't say what the assignment was, that should be fine.

Foreigners, then, that explained a lot. And by the slight difference in accent...Sasuke would have to say north-eastern or north-western states. "I see. Then welcome to Canada, the land of maple syrup, hockey, and polar bears." He cracks a slight smile. "Sometimes all three at once."

"That does sound like an interesting combination." Itachi couldn't help but laugh.

Sasuke laughs softly, nodding as he fills up a tray of beers. "Yeah, this country is full of the strangest combinations, even for those of us who live here." Sure, some people didn't bat an eye, but sometimes, the stereotypes were just so true that they were funny. "But I should warn you, people do not live in igloos, or ride polar bears, caribou, or moose to school or work, and not ALL of us apologize all the time for things not our fault." He sure didn't. At least, he didn't think so.

He chuckles at that and nods. "I'll try to keep that in mind." Itachi winks at him. "Anything else, I should know?"

"Oh, I can think of a few." Sasuke smirks at the thought of the Americans who came, expecting Canada to either be the land of snow or the land of sun. "If you're staying for a while, get proper winter gear, the winter gets pretty chilly. But remember to keep shorts and t-shirts handy, it can warm up to sunshine or rain a couple of days after the snow hits."

Well, that seemed like a logical advice. "Good to know." He'd have to stock up on things.

"Also..." Sasuke leans across the bar, lowering his voice. "Watch out for the coeds. When they're drunk, they're giggly, but when they're just lightly tipsy, they can turn into a pack of piranhas when a hot guy walks in." Fortunately, the coeds giggling in the corner looked like they were well on their way past merely tipsy. He'd have to be sure to call them a couple of cabs later.

"I'll consider that a compliment." Itachi couldn't resist getting a few jabs in. "That you view me as worthy material for piranhas."

Sasuke shrugs as he straightens up behind the bar. "I'm disinterested, not blind." Was he expected not to know that someone was aesthetically pleasing just because he didn't want to sleep with them? "I know what a beautiful woman looks like, and I know what a handsome man looks like. It's not a great mystery."

He was a series of contradictions. Itachi didn't know whether to be flattered or roll his eyes at the other man. "You have a gift for complimenting people and insulting them at the same time." He shakes his head. "Should I consider it complementary with the drink?"

Sasuke shrugs. "If you want to. Gaara says I'm good at that. I don't usually bother when it's the
coeds." With them, he was more concerned about being swarmed, or making sure they got sent home safely.

Itachi smiles and nods as he orders another drink. If nothing else, he was sure tonight would be most amusing.

Sighing as he slides off the leather jacket, Sasuke sits down in a chair in the back room. It was three in the morning, and he was exhausted. He didn't understand how bartenders could do this every night. He felt like he could go back to the motel and sleep for days.

And then there was that guy…the one who stayed at the bar the whole time he was there, just being as distracting as he possibly could. Sasuke had no idea what his deal was, but if he was hoping that this would end with them sleeping together, he was sorely mistaken.

Finally, Gaara enters the back room and walks over to Sasuke. He'd peeked out of the office earlier, and never before had he seen someone manage to monopolize the other man's attention in such a way before. Maybe, he was finally going to seek out some physical companionship.

Sasuke looks up at the sounds of feet approaching, closing his eyes again when he sees that familiar red hair. "I still don't know how you talked me into this. I know you didn't compel me…" Wait but would he know if he were being compelled or not?

"Because I'm your friend and the one who saved your ass." Gaara smiles at him. "That's how. Anyway, how did it go with Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome?"

Cue the rolling of dark eyes behind closed lids, the contacts now finally gone. "It didn't. He annoyed me for a few hours while his cousin was off partying with the fairies, then dragged the idiot home when he'd had enough." He knew what Gaara was implying and it wasn't going to work.

Honestly, Sasuke was so clueless. Gaara didn't even know where to begin. It would have been funny, if it wasn't so damn sad. "Yes, I'm sure it was a great hardship for you." He rolls his eyes.

Sasuke sighs unhappily. "I made conversation with him. That doesn't mean that I'm going to sleep with him. Or anyone." Sure, he was attractive, but…Sasuke just didn't feel the way other people felt. His emotions had been beaten, broken, and all twisted up before being smashed back together in an attempt to make him function semi-normally. People just…didn't arouse him, no matter how attractive they were.

"I wasn't saying that you were going to sleep with him." Gaara shakes his head and sighs. "Not right away at least."

"Right, because he'd be happy with an asexual partner." Sasuke scoffs at the notion. "Besides, he's foreign, here on assignment for…something. He's not going to be here long enough for it to matter. I was just passing the time. You had me at the bar eight whole hours."

Gaara resists the impulse to punch Sasuke through a wall for being so damn well, annoying. "If you have to rationalize it to that extent, we both know that I'm right." Honestly, the red head was half ready to kill Orochimaru for Sasuke. Unfortunately, it wouldn't do any good.

"I rationalize it to that extent because you'd push harder on a small argument for being too weak." Not that Sasuke really thought that the stubborn vampire was going to budge just because he said to. "Rationalizing is about proving you're right, isn't it?"
"No." Silly humans. "It's about trying to fool yourself into believing you're not wrong." Though they could be amusing at times.

Onyx eyes narrow at the redheaded vampire. "Do you want me to stake you?" Because Gaara was making it look very tempting right about now.

He raises an eyebrow. Idly, he wonders if Sasuke would be foolish enough to attempt such a thing and even more foolish to believe he could manage it. "If you wish to make a fool of yourself, you're more than welcome to try." He had been a Ripper for decades. He feared almost nothing.

"I dunno, I've got a pretty long body count, and you wouldn't be my first vampire." Sasuke's lips twitch upwards into a wry smirk. "I think I've got a stake hidden around the bar somewhere."

Gaara wasn't entirely certain if Sasuke had just lost his damn mind or if he was hoping to scare him. If it was the latter, he would be sorely disappointed. "Give it your best shot." Because Gaara would ensure it was his only shot, if he did.

"Hm…suicide by vampire." Sasuke chuckles at the thought. "I'll consider it once Orochimaru is dead." Before that, though, there was no way Sasuke was going to do something that stupid. Still, it had gotten the crazy vampire off his case, which was a plus.

Gaara rolls his eyes. He wasn't even going to dignify that with a response. His games had ceased to be amusing. So he just looks over the bar.

Sasuke sighs softly. Maybe he'd taken it a bit too far. "…I know you mean well, Gaara, and I appreciate it. You've looked after me for years, and I'll never be able to thank you enough for that." Maybe if he was normal, he could do it. But like this, he doubted it. "I just...don't know what I'm supposed to do once this is all over. Trying to imagine a life beyond all this is...fuzzy." Not that it was going to keep him from completing his mission, he just couldn't really see much beyond ending the life of the man who'd made his own life complete and utter hell.

"So after surviving all that you want to hand them a victory in the form of your death." Gaara couldn't keep a hiss out of his voice. He could feel his fangs cutting into his tongue. "Because make no mistake, it's your choice in the end but that is EXACTLY what you will be doing." He wouldn't say any more on the matter. He hated those who 'preached' to others and his own list of faults was at least a mile long, but damn it...Sasuke could be infuriating with his martyr complex sometimes.

Silence reigns as the vampire gazes out into the empty bar, Sasuke's own eyes on him. He knew the reasoning behind what Gaara had said, and even agreed to some extent. It was just hard to see past his mission, to when it was over. To live, you needed a reason, otherwise you were just existing. And Sasuke…was still looking for a reason, something for himself, instead of for someone else's sake.

He just…needed a reason to keep going.
Shisui loped out of his room at about noon the next day and everything felt kind of…fuzzy. He barely remembered the night before, except that there was a lot of pretty lights, funny sounds, and…man did he want a hug.

So, he saunters up behind Itachi, watching the news in the kitchen, and drapes himself over his cousin's back. "Morning sweetie." He rubs his cheek contentedly against his cousin's hair, enjoying the soft scent of shampoo wafting from it. "You smell good today."

"..." Itachi didn't even begin to know how to respond to that. "I love you, Shisui, but not like that." They were cousins for goodness sakes. This was so disturbing on so many levels. Hell, Itachi wasn't even sure that Shisui liked men period.

"You know, you're really pretty, 'Tachi." Shisui giggles serenely. "When we go home, we're going out to find your soulmate, okay? A cousin as nice as you deserves a nice, pretty soulmate to match. I bet the flower girl is going to be beautiful inside and out. Just like a fairy." Shisui's eyes start to gleam. "Oh! What if your soulmate IS a fairy!?"

He was high as a kite. "I'm going to get a camera." Itachi sighs as he gets out his cell phone and hits record. "I'm never going to let you live this down. Never."

"Aw...don't be like that, 'Tachi." Shisui grins as he reattaches himself to Itachi. "M' serious. You need a nice girlfriend. She can have pretty dark eyes and soft hair, and she'll remind you of moonlight, and she'll love you and only you. I promise!"

"You're a little terrifying right now." Itachi takes a step back as he continues filming. "You're starting to remind me of a serial killer who has just lost their mind."

"M' not a killer." Shisui giggles at the thought. "We're hunting a killer, right? That's our job." He blinks, tilting his head slightly. "We're...hunting a killer, right?" Then, his eyes light up with realization. "Ah! We're supposed to meet the detective this afternoon!"

Damn it. That was a good point. How long did it take fairy dust to wear off? "Yes, you're right." Itachi shakes his head. He couldn't allow this to happen. "You're staying here though. I'll handle it."
He wouldn't subject the detective to this shit.

"Aw..." Shisui whines dejectedly. "But I want to go with you! I can behave, I promise!" He could be a good CIA agent today, he'd be the best agent ever!

Itachi shakes his head and gets out a pair of handcuffs. No, he wasn't letting Shisui anywhere near the detective in this state. So logically, he slaps the cuffs on one of Shisui's feet and drags him to the bathroom. "You're staying here." After all, if he was going to be restrained for potentially hours, certain considerations were necessary. "This way if you have to... perform certain biological functions, you can." Itachi sits him down on the toilet with a closed lid and makes sure the handcuff was on good. "I have the key. So you're not going anywhere."

"But I'm hungry!" Shisui pouts as he wiggles about on the lid. "Go get me a sandwich!" Then, he thinks better of it. "A whole plate of sandwiches! And a magazine!" Or ten. He'd get so boooored.

"Fine." Itachi groans as he complies with those requests. "Here. Just stop being annoying."

Hopefully, the dust wouldn't last long.

"Thank you!" Shisui grins happily as he bites into the first sandwich, his eyes glazing over a bit. "These are good!" He could be happy here. He had sandwiches and magazines. He didn't need to go...wherever Itachi was going. "Oh, and have fun looking for your soulmate!"

God save him from his cousin's stupidity. Itachi just gives a curt nod and continues on his way. He was early, but he would strangle Shisui if he stayed much longer.

At quarter to one, Detective Yamashiro looks up from his papers to see a young man approaching the hotel. From the profiles he got, he surmised that this was the younger agent, Itachi Uchiha. Surprisingly, he was alone. He was expecting two of them to meet with him today. "You're right on time. Thank you for coming such a long way, Agent."

"Well given the nature of the case, it didn't seem right not to." Itachi watches him with anxious eyes. "This level of brutality and skill is quite troubling. As for my partner, he won't be joining us today." He sighs. "We were sightseeing last night and he bit off more than he could chew. He just needs to sleep it off."

Aoba raises an eyebrow, but raises no questions. "Right. Well, you're right about the brutality. I've never seen anything like it before." The body had been...put through its paces, to put it lightly. "The body's been taken to the morgue, but I've got photos of it, the same as the ones in the files we sent over, and a few extra that I didn't feel right putting in there." They were extremely disturbing. "The rest of the crime scene has been tagged and samples have been bagged and sent to the lab. I assume, from the profile of you that I was given, that you'll want some time alone in the study?"

"That might be ideal." Itachi smiles at him. "No offense is intended of course, but if you have anything you'd like to add I'd be grateful for it."

"Apart from the fact that whoever did this has some serious anger issues that he decided to take out on the old man?" Aoba shakes his head as he shows the agent the way to the elevator. "That's the strange thing. As far as our experts could find, there's almost no trace of the killer, apart from the dead bodies. No strands of hair, no skin under the victim's fingernails from defending himself, no blood spilled from the bullets that were lodged in the doorway. Just three bodies, the victim and his two bodyguards. One psychic, one not." At least, they assumed that Danzo was the main target and not one of his bodyguards. A bodyguard could be eliminated alone, with less of a media mess. This was a lot louder than that.
"Yes, other than that." Unfortunately, the man wasn't telling Itachi anything he didn't already know or hadn't guessed. "I'll take that as a no then. I'll do my best to get a reading." He couldn't make any promises though. This killer might as well have been a ghost.

"Alright, then you'll be wanting the twenty-fifth. The penthouse suite takes up the entire floor." A fitting place for so pompous a man. Aoba might be doing his job, but that didn't mean he wasn't fine with seeing that man go. "Good luck, Agent. I hope that you find more than we did."

Itachi nods as he makes his way to the twenty-fifth. He wasn't looking forward to this, but it had to be done. Luckily, he had already donned a pair of gloves. He didn't want his fingerprints to confuse the other investigators.

The inside of the penthouse suite was luxurious, as expected, with red velvet curtains and matching furniture. It had an older feel to it, with polished mahogany and marble flooring in the sitting room and small kitchen. Though the kitchen didn't appear used at all. Standing off to the left was a single door leading to the bedroom, off to the right, another stood alone with warning markers around the frame.

"This won't be pleasant." Itachi sighs as he follows himself to follow the warnings. "Let's see if I can't get a reading off this." Such a violent death was bound to leave some kind of impression. Maybe, Danzo had seen his killer's face.

Inside the study, three large pools of dried blood stand in eerie contrast to the ruined mahogany flooring. But most startling was the state of the desk. Blood covered the entire desk and there was substantial evidence to suggest that the majority of the crime had taken place there. The surface of the wood was littered with wood chips, where a blade had been plunged into the top. And the chips were covered in blood.

A flash of darkness, and a clean cut to the throat of the first guard in the back corner of the room, away from the door.

Movement through the shadows, the second guard easily dispatched after the first.

"Danzo..." A soft voice echoes dimly through the room, distorted slightly, as though heard through the crackling static of an almost tuned old radio.

He braces himself. Uncertain if it was an echo of the memory or perhaps a ghost that lingered even now. Itachi wouldn't take any chances.

Dark, ghostly images glide across the room, two on the floor, one rising to their feet, one standing between the door and the desk.

"What kind of demon are you?!" The panicked, gravelly voice of a man far past his prime emanates from behind the desk.

"A demon...yes...you called me that when we first met." The first voice wavers like water, but the amusement within it remains clear.

The voice continue, garbled, until the old man's voice makes a sudden reappearance. "If I didn't finance his experiments, someone else would have."

The crackling grows stronger, obscuring most, but not all of the derisive, spiteful tone. "...Only three of us survived. I'm the only one left, now." And with it, came a wave of bloodlust, sadness, and unimaginable pain.
"Your life will be meaningless!"

"...You think I care?" Silence reigns. "...my face, at least. You and the snake always did agree that I was one of the pretty ones." Red eyes glow in the darkness, obscured briefly by strands of raven black.

Gunshots. "Orochimaru was always careless when it came to his pets."

"Uchiha."

Itachi's eyes widen. So another Uchiha had been involved. It was no wonder that the killer had supernatural abilities. Their family was extraordinarily gifted in that respect.

The figure with the blade disappears, reappearing behind the one behind the desk, slamming the elder against it. "Your ghost will see...after I've cut you apart." Ghostly screams of pain pierce the din, echoing from a torture not long past. Blood spurts across the room, as red as the ruby eyes glaring down at his victim.

"Ruby eyes." There was no mistaking it now. "Just like our family." He had to get out of here. He had to tell Shisui. So Itachi darts down back towards Aoba. "I think I may have a lead, but I must look into it more before I can confirm it." With that being said, he quickly leaves for his cousin.

The detective blinks bemusedly as the young agent darts off. He scratches his head, not entirely sure what to make of this 'new lead' he was talking about. "...Okay?" ...Maybe he needed to use some of those vacation days.

Itachi skids inside the house and scurries into the bathroom, quickly freeing his cousin. "The man responsible is an Uchiha." There could be no doubt about it. "Ruby red eyes and he called himself an Uchiha."

"What!?" Shisui blinks, his eyes clearing as he shakes out his rather numb leg. He'd been so bored just sitting there after going through all of the magazines, and now his cousin had the gall to drop THAT on him!? "But I thought that he was a shadow-walker. We're not shadow-walkers." No one in the family was, as far as he knew, they were all psychics, if anything. It wasn't something that ran in their family. And that was something that DEFINITELY ran in families. They might as well be another supernatural species. "How would we NOT know that there was one of those in our family?"

"I don't know." Itachi shakes his head. "I just know he has the same eyes we have. So he's not making it up."

Shisui sits back down on the toilet, now completely brought down from his earlier high. "...A red-eyed shadow-walker...someone in our family..." But as far as he knew, all of their family were accounted for. "But who could it be? There's no way that Madara wouldn't know about a shadow-walker. They'd have been brought home in an instant if there was one. And all of our relatives have either been accounted for or passed away." And he would know, he knew the family tree by heart. Every Uchiha did.

"Well obviously someone was unaccounted for because I know what I saw and heard, Shisui." He understood the shock, but there was no denying the reality of their situation.

Shisui shakes his head, frowning in confusion. "But..." Okay, there were ways of going about this that might lead them to whoever the killer was. "Alright...we need to get in touch with your father. If anyone knows who might be unaccounted for, it's him." And whatever was going on, they
needed to stop this wayward relative before he did any more harm.

Itachi nods as he takes out his phone. He slowly dials Madara's number. Not because he feared his father, but because he had no idea how to explain this to the man.

Not two rings later, the line connects. "Hello, Itachi." A deep, rumbling voice comes through from the other side of the line. "Are you enjoying your time abroad?" More like was he being productive…

"I'd enjoy it more if you know of any shadow-walker in our family." He'd just be blunt.

The Uchiha patriarch pauses. "…Not currently, no."

"There is, but he's not in our records." Itachi sighs as he bites his lower lip. "This call is safe from being overheard?"

"Of course." As if Madara Uchiha would settle for anything less. He never spoke on insecure lines. "Now, what is it that you believe concerning this Uchiha that is supposedly capable of walking through the darkness?"

"I was investigating a murder and there was an echo." As there often was in murder cases. "The man was called Uchiha by Danzo and had eyes like ours."

"A man was identified by the latest victim as an Uchiha…?" That was even more impossible, and Madara knew precisely why. "There is only one member of our clan who carries the abilities of the shadow-walkers, though not strongly enough to be called such, and she is certainly not a man. She married into the family many years ago. Though, I suppose that it would be more accurate to say that her husband married out of our family and moved to Vancouver to be with her." A decision that had not been popular with the rest of the family.

"Did she have a child?" Itachi feels his breath hitch. "A son?" Perhaps her abilities had been more latent than anything else, but that hadn't been the case with her son.

Madara sighs, remembering the day the news had been received. "Yes, she did have a son once. But that was a very long time ago."

"That son is most likely the killer." Itachi sighs. "I can't blame him for killing Danzo, but the brutality is extreme and he'll be caught sooner or later. He has learned how to use his gifts to the fullest extent possible."

Perhaps this was a shadow-walker, but it could not be the boy. "The child died, Itachi." And Madara remembered the day that he delivered the news. "It was fourteen years ago that the child was found murdered. Whether he might have been a shadow-walker or not is therefore irrelevant."

"Are you so sure he died?" Itachi raises an eyebrow. "Because if that's the case then we have a ghost shadow-walker."

"Yes, Itachi." The reports had left no doubt, and the crime had never been solved. Even if they were estranged from Fugaku, it was something still stuck in Madara's craw after all these years. "I believe that you and Shisui both remember the day you received the news that your younger cousin Sasuke had been killed. Wasn't it your reason for becoming federal agents?"

Itachi feels as though he had been smacked. So that was it then. Sasuke. "Well, either Sasuke is a ghost and still capable of using his powers or he's not nearly as dead as we've been led to believe." Why though? "I don't understand, but I know what I saw."
Once more, Madara sighs. "Very well. You wish to entertain this foolish notion, so be it. Then let me ask you this. If the child had somehow survived, how then was he never found? Who would have sheltered him these last fourteen years? And why would he not reach out to his family? Had he made himself known to be alive, one of my ears to the ground would have heard something."

"Well, Danzo was known to deal in the black market." Itachi frowns as more disturbing possibilities occur to him. "It wouldn't surprise me if he somehow sold the boy."

The line goes quiet, an eerie silence settling over them for a moment. "If that were so, then I believe that Danzo got precisely what he deserved. A merciless killer this shadow-walker may be, but it seems he is not completely without direction if he is taking out men like Danzo."

"Yes, sadly he'll be caught sooner or later." Unless he really was a ghost.

"Indeed he will." And suddenly, Madara found the sympathy in his son's voice rather amusing. "By you, if I'm not mistaken. After all, this man has murdered enough important people across the globe to have the CIA after him. Who knows how many more innocents he will harm with his killing spree?"

"I'm not entirely sure how many were innocents." Not that Itachi could get off on that logic. "The law is the law though and better Shisui and I than someone else."

"Yes, most other agents might deem it necessary to end such a dangerous threat on the spot. With your abilities, the two of you have a better chance of taking him alive so that he can be made to see justice." And Madara had his way of…perusing the list the the killer's suspected victim. It quite impressed him, and even disturbed him slightly. "But he is certainly dangerous, and if it comes down to your life or his, I expect you not to return home in a casket. And see that Shisui does the same."

His father had the strangest way of saying 'I love you'. Itachi shakes his head in amusement at that thought. "I'll do my best." What else could he do?

Madara chuckles. "An Uchiha always does their best." Or one was not truly an Uchiha. "I will see you again after your assignment is finished. Try not to keep me waiting too long, Itachi."

His hand lingers on the phone for a few tense seconds before he sets it down. It was that or crush it into a million tiny pieces with his vice grip. "Go ahead, Shisui." The young Uchiha sighs. "I know you've been biting your tongue."

Biting his tongue was one way of putting it. Where should he even start. "...So our little cousin, who we thought was dead in an unsolved murder case is actually ALIVE, and he's a prolific serial killer who's had a list of over a hundred people in the last four years." It was supposed to be a question, but there was really very little room for doubt. "Our shadow-walker is Sasuke."

Itachi didn't see a reason to deny it. All the pieces were falling together rather neatly. There was only one problem. They had no idea where Sasuke actually was or what he looked like. "Yes, that's about the size of it." Maybe, he should invest in some fairy dust after all. "What we're going to do about all of this remains to be seen though." Dealing with the fact his cousin was a serial killer was enough to cause even him to need a...distraction. Such as a grumpy bartender with blue hair.

This…was not the news that Shisui had wanted to hear. Hell, it was news he never thought he COULD hear. Their cousin was supposed to have died years ago, it was why he and Itachi joined the CIA. They'd thought about the NYPD and the FBI, but ultimately, the only way to get at cases across their borders was to go to the CIA. He'd hoped it would be a dead end, that they wouldn't
have to arrest someone in their own family, but it seemed that they weren't going to be nearly so lucky. And their little cousin, at that…

But in the end, Shisui knew what had to be done. "We have to bring him in, Itachi." It didn't matter if it was their cousin or not. "He's a psychopathic or at least sociopathic serial killer. He can't be left out there to kill more people, even if some of them deserve it." And clearly, if there were mentions of the black market and selling people, then someone DID deserve to bite it. "At least…if it's us, he'll end up in prison, instead of dead." But he'd still be in prison for the rest of his life.

Shisui wasn't telling him anything that he didn't already know. That didn't make it any easier though. Poor Sasuke. He bites back a groan and nods. "I understand." Itachi couldn't stop the sigh that escapes his lips though. "That doesn't mean that I have to like it."

"Neither of us have to like it." But it was the job they'd signed up for. "Alright, what about the rest of what you found out? Did you find out anything about him that we could use to track him down before he kills again?" The sooner they found Sasuke, the sooner they could put this mess behind them.

Not really. Just enough material to haunt Itachi for the rest of his days. "I'm afraid not. All I know is that Orochimaru and Danzo were working together in some capacity." It didn't take a genius to figure out how. "He probably financed whatever demented schemes the snake was up to and that's why Sasuke killed him."

Shisui blinks, the name ringing a bell. "The Japanese biochemist and medical researcher?" That wasn't a name he'd expected to hear. But…now that he thought about it. "He's published an awful lot on the biology and chemistry of supernatural species…one of the best researchers in the world…" Of course, there would always be rumors about how he got hold of some of his data, but…most of it was the grumblings of jealous rivals, or that's how it was explained away, anyway.

Itachi nods simply. He knew that Shisui was smart enough to read between the lines. The younger Uchiha just wished that his cousin didn't have to. "That's the one." Anyone that gained such an intimate knowledge of supernatural biology, well they were obviously up to something. "His findings were too detailed to be all strictly voluntarily. Though no one could ever prove that."

"And now he's going to end up murdered for it." Not that Shisui could blame Sasuke, but…this was a rampage of destruction that had to end. "We need to locate Orochimaru as soon as possible. Once we have his location, we'll know where our killer will strike next." And then, they could ascertain whether it was Sasuke Uchiha or not. If they were wrong, that was fine, they'd still have their killer. If they were right…well, they'd cross that bridge when they came to it. "…Alright, you head out and get your head cleared up, I'll work on getting a location on Orochimaru and drawing a link between all the other victims." It was the least he could do after getting high on fairy dust.

"You sure you're ready to do that?" He looks at Shisui. "This can't be any easier on you than it is on me." Which was to say not at all.

"Yeah." Shisui sighs, running a hand through tousled black hair. "I've been at this longer than you, Itachi. It's not the first time I've had to do something I don't like. But at least I can try to find him before he gets himself killed. He can't keep playing God." No one had the right to decide who lived and who died. Not that it stopped people from trying.

He wasn't so sure about that, but Itachi had never tried to read Shisui's mind. Mostly as a matter of courtesy, but also because the other man had a powerful gift. It might not be wise to rummage through his head. "Alright." Itachi sighs as heads off. "I'll see you later then."
"Have fun seducing the bartender!" Shisui couldn't help but get a jab in. "I think he's ace, though, so good luck." He may have been busy getting high on fairy dust, but he'd kept an eye on his cousin and the bartender. Most people he'd seen would be at least a little interested in Itachi beyond conversation, and somehow...the bartender had completely shut that part of himself off. Shisui wasn't sure why, but if it was a natural disposition, then Itachi was going to have a REALLY hard time.

Itachi rolls his eyes. He could deny that, but Shisui wouldn't listen anyway. Besides, he didn't have any real intention of seeking that bartender out again. The man was amusing, but he wasn't interested and this was only supposed to be a brief assignment. "Besides, he's might not even be working tonight." Itachi shakes his head in amusement as he heads back to the club. "Perhaps a small exposure to the fairies is in order though."

Shisui cackles at the thought of his upright cousin going to the club to get high on fairy dust. "Alright, well say hello to the girls for me, then. And give them each a kiss for me!"

It was probably beneath him, but Itachi flips his cousin off all the same. Shisui walked right into that one, and Itachi rolls his eyes as the door slams shut behind him.
Drowning in Sorrows

Chapter by celestia193

Chapter Notes

celestia193's Author's Note: Warnings for a sensitive and traumatized Sasuke, and a drunk/high Itachi.

For the second night in a row, Sasuke stands behind the bar, never resting in one place for more than five seconds at a time. If nothing else, it helped him stay active when he wasn't out on a mission. The tips were pretty nice as well. He could almost imagine doing this longer than a few weeks. And knowing Gaara, the vampire would try to keep him here for as long as possible. Not to mention Temari, who burst into his house yet again to exercise full control regarding decisions about his hair, clothes, and makeup. …At least it was just eyeliner…

Still, by six, the club was already in full swing. The patrons liked to get in early and stay up late, which was fine by him, he worked in the shadows anyway. And the vampires started getting hungry about this point, and he knew that Gaara would be on the prowl sooner or later. Temari was already out front scoping out the willing ones.

And…he was stuck behind the bar with all the alcohol. One of these days, he was totally going to break into Gaara's stash of the good stuff and help himself.

Itachi walks into the club and smiles. "Definitely a popular spot." It wasn't the most well known of the clubs or the largest, but it was certainly growing.

Sasuke spots his patron from last night as he walks into the club, rolling his eyes and stifling a groan. Temari definitely would have seen that one come in, which means that Gaara would find out, and then Gaara would proceed to tease him again about Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome. That was the last thing he needed to focus on right now.

Except that, apparently, the man was going to give him no choice but to focus on him tonight. Again.

Fortunately, Itachi hadn't spotted him. His eyes seemed to be on the fairies and his expression was unexpectedly sullen considering what he had been like the night before.

One of the fairies spots him and flutters over, two braids swaying down her back from twin buns in her hair. "Oh, why do you look so down?" Wait, she recognized this one. "You're…Itachi, right? Shisui's cousin." He looked like the fun guy from last night, the one they'd poured so much fairy dust on it was a miracle he'd managed to keep his clothes on. Or theirs.

"It's been a long day at work." Itachi sighs, but forces himself to smile. "Yes, I have the supreme privilege and exasperation of being Shisui's cousin." Both parts came in equal measure these days.

She snickers, putting a hand on his arm and sprinkling just a pinch of dust over his head. He looked like he really needed it. "I can think of worse people to be related to, I promise." And she knew what long days felt like, or at least, she imagined that they were kind of like having a little too close
an encounter with a vampire who liked fairy blood too much. "My name is Tenten."

"I'm Itachi." He smiles at her. "Yes, I suppose that's true. As you no doubt know, he can be a handful sometimes."

"A handful of fun." She'd been pretty close to abducting him for the night. "So, you here for the fairy dust? Or are you looking for Alex tips?"

"The dust and conversation." He smiles at her. "As fascinating as he is, I doubt he's really all that interested and I've never really spoken to a fairy at length before."

Ooh, now Tenten liked this one. "Yeah… I think we could talk a while." She looks him up and down, grinning as she considers just what other kinds of talking they could do. After all, if Neji never paid her any attention, why dwell? There were plenty of hot guys around. "You do look like you could use some fairy cheer." She motions to her now relatively empty booth, the three other fairies already up and about and mingling with the crowd.

He couldn't argue with that. Still, he didn't want to get her hopes up if she thought he was going to be around for awhile, he wasn't. He quickly glances at her arms. No match, but that didn't necessarily mean one wouldn't pass the time with pleasurable company. He just didn't want to wind up hurting her.

"That sounds like a grand idea." He follows her. "Unfortunately, I'm only in this country on an assignment for work. I'm not certain how long I'll be here." A polite warning not to get too attached. It seemed the honorable thing to do.

"That's alright." Tenten smiles softly as she sits on the soft leather bench, patting the place beside her. She'd caught that look at her tattoos and knew exactly what he was looking for. "I know where my match is. I'm just waiting for him to pull the stick out of his ass. No point in waiting around like a lovesick schoolgirl while he gets it surgically removed, though."

He blinks and rubs the back of his head sheepishly. Well, that was good to know. No need to worry about hurting her. "Well for your sake and his, I hope he comes to his senses sooner rather than later." He chuckles. "It's rather ungentlemanly to keep a pretty fairy such as yourself waiting for too long."

"Tell me about it." She chuckles with a hint of melancholy. "But I've waited this long, and I don't mind waiting a couple centuries more." However long it took for him to finally see her. "After all, I've got forever, don't I?" Then, her laugh takes on a lighter tone. "Anyway, we're not here to talk about my romance troubles. We're here to get you out of the dumps!"

"Well, I don't mind listening." He smiles at her. "It will work out since you're matched, but you're quite right about that." He was probably going to regret this. "What do you have in mind?"

"Hm, well…" Tenten could think of a few fun ideas, but judging by this guy's cool head, they were going to need to take a few drastic measures. "Oh! I have an idea!" They'd done this with Shisui last night, so it would totally work again tonight! She was sure of it. "Give me like… thirty seconds, I'll be right back." She shifts in her seat and flutters up over the table, landing with the click of heeled boots against the floor. "We need shots."

Oh boy. This was bound to get interesting, Itachi imagines the outcome. Intoxicated fairies.

Tenten grins as she disappears into the crowd, reappearing thirty seconds later with a tray of six rainbow-colored shots letting off silver sparks. "Fairy Dusters!"
"Are those safe?" He blinks at them in surprise.

"Of course!" she places them on the table in front of Itachi and sits across from him, placing three shots in front of both of them. "They didn't kill your cousin, did they? And he had like ten!"

Well, that explained why Shisui was carrying on like that. "Point taken." He'd probably cap himself at one or two and not make nearly as big a fool out of himself then.

She raises up her first shot, grinning widely. "Down the hatch!" Then she tosses it back like it's nobody's business, downing the swirling rainbow liquid as a few stray sparks leap from her lips. "Best part is that they can make any kiss feel like there's fireworks going off."

"Good to know." He laughs as he samples the drink. "Damn. That really does have a kick to it." It was like liquid sugar and sunshine or something.

"Yeah, Alex does the best shots." Tenten giggles as she puts the first shot glass upside down on the tray. "Seven different liqueurs in it, it's like a fruit explosion in your mouth. Then he lets us top it off with a little fairy dust, and you get some serious magic punch."

"Not yet, it's not." Which was something of a disappointment, really. Tenten loved these shots. "This is Alex's second night officially here. Before, he would just pop in once in a while and tend the bar so that Gaara could get himself a drink. He's the only one who makes them, so I always make sure to get a couple when I can."

"Good to know." He smiles as he gets himself another shot. "Well, I suppose that I can always call a cab."

"Probably a good idea." Thankfully, Tenten could still fly home after twenty shots, so she'd be here a while. "So, you said that you had a long day at work? Wanna share what happened?"

"I can't really." Itachi had to tell her something, but he didn't want to lie. "Police work." So generic answers were his friend right now.

"Oh…tough case, then." She had a couple friends in the department, they could get like this after a bad day. Hm…then what could it be…she would have to be vague if it was an ongoing investigation. "Is it someone you work with? Or is it that there are details about your case that you're not comfortable with?"

"The latter." He shakes his head and smiles at her. "You're a curious one, but I suppose that's in your species nature."

She shrugs. "I've got friends who do that kind of work. Someone has to worry about the people keeping us safe, right?" Besides, it's not like she was going to ask to see his case files. "But okay, so you've got a case and there's details about it that you're not happy with. Cops get upset with their cases over their personal morals. So…the question you have to ask is whether your morals are more important than the case. And once you have your answer, stick to it. Then you'll be able to decide where to go from there."

"Unfortunately, this one is a very gray area no matter which side I choose." He smiles at her wistfully. "Sadly, real life isn't like the fairy tales. Pun intended."

She smirks at the pun, then tosses back her second shot. "Well, if you're screwed no matter what
you do, then choose the path that inflicts the least amount of damage. Or legal issues. Those are a pain to deal with." Not that she'd had any legal issues herself, but she knew a cop who could be more than a little over-zealous at times and it could get him into spots of trouble.

"I suppose that's a good point." He smiles. "In that case, one path is...easier."

She frowns slightly. "But you still don't like it." It seemed to her like the man was in quite the moral dilemma. "Well, then I guess that's what these are for." She hands him his third shot, while taking her own. "To decisions that haunt us and to awesome bartenders, because they make the first one not matter anymore."

"A most excellent toast." Itachi clinks his glass with hers and downs his third drink. "I've never drank anything that hits me this quickly before."

"That's because Alex is the best bartender alive, and because my dust is the fun, sexy kind." If only it worked on other fairies, that would make her life so much easier.

One drink led to another, then another, then their second round. Before Itachi knew it, he makes his way over to the bar and smiles at Alex. "Hey." For some reason, it seemed like a good idea to do so now when it hadn't before.

Sasuke raises an eyebrow at the clearly half intoxicated man before him. "Hi." So, he hadn't gone home with the fairy after all. He'd been expecting it, what with the way they were getting friendly and pounding back the shots over the last two hours.

"You should try one of the fairy shots you made," Itachi smiles slyly at him. "It might help you relax more and take that stick out of your exceptionally well shaped posterior."

…Yeah, he was definitely wasted. Damn, apparently he hadn't kept a close enough eye on Itachi. "I'm perfectly happy with the stick right where it is. Besides, I don't get to have Fairy Dusters until I'm off my shift." And by then, the fairies were usually gone.

That was no fun. He really needed to loosen up and Itachi knew just how to make that happen. "Well, I guess if you don't think you can handle your own drink, it's probably best to wait then." He smiles at him.

Sasuke's eyes narrow at the challenge. "I can hold my alcohol just fine, but I'm not allowed to drink behind the bar, club rules. Gaara doesn't drink behind the bar either." Not that he couldn't after all, alcohol didn't affect vampires nearly as much. "I have to be the responsible one, remember? I'm in charge of making sure that no one gets alcohol poisoning or leaves without a safe way home."

"Well I imagine he'd be willing to bend the rules for you since you're apparently dating his sister." He chuckles. "Have it your way then. You don't know what you're missing."

His lips twitching, Sasuke busies himself with stacking used shot glasses in the crystal cleaner behind the bar. "Doing my job properly has nothing to do with who I am or aren't dating."

He shakes his head. It was probably just as well that Alex was asexual. Sheesh. "I didn't know robots came complete with electric blue hair these days." Itachi shakes his head and smiles. "Do you ever do anything that deviates from your programming?"

Alright, this guy wanted to play hard, Sasuke could do that. "Yes, in fact. I just so happen to spend my nights hanging upside down from rooftops, pretending to be a bat as I watch people with creepy eyes."
"I suppose that was bound to happen as you're friends with vampires." Itachi chuckles.

Right, Sasuke should have seen that one coming. "Well, at least now I know when to cut you off in the future. Yes, I'm friends with vampires, and they're very protective of me." Frighteningly so, at times. "Temari also likes to use me as her human mannequin and put bright streaks in my hair and dress me in leather. Apparently they suit my already punk-ish attitude."

Itachi snorts in amusement. "I can't entirely blame her for that hobby." The man did bring it on himself.

This man…was extremely aggravating. Sasuke much preferred him when he wasn't mostly drunk. At least then he provided better conversation. He stretches out his left arm, leaning it against the bar. "Besides, is there a problem with blue? Other than the fact that apparently, it makes me look like I'm gay." Maybe it was starting to grow on him a little. …Just a little.

"I think it flatters you." He smiles. "Though I imagine the natural black looks even better." When Itachi had started caring that much about hair, he wasn't sure. Probably when he started drinking fairy dust.

Sasuke's eyes widen slightly, then he rolls them, not sure if he should agree or not. "I suppose the black is fine, but the blue goes better with this job. It makes me look more approachable." And so did the leather, apparently. Not that he wanted to be approached, but Temari insisted it was a good thing. Then again, according to Temari, you would find very little outside of the bright pastel shades that wouldn't flatter him.

But it was time to turn off this topic, since it was just a little embarrassing. "Your cousin isn't here with you tonight. Did he need a day to sleep off the fairy dust?"

His concern was touching, but Itachi also saw it for what it was. "He's recovered from his night of revelry, but he's working." Itachi shrugs gracelessly. "If you're worried about me breaking your chastity belt because he's not here, you don't need to. That would imply you'd actually loosen up and you're a robot. A sexy robot, but still a robot."

And…that was it. "I'm not a fucking robot, and I don't have a damn chastity belt!" That sort of notion was a childish indulgence. A slew of unpleasant emotions well up in Sasuke, nearly spilling out for microsecond before he reigns them all back in and stumps them deep into the ground where he didn't have to feel them anymore. He takes a deep breath and reaches for a number of bottles and a clean shot glass. "Dammit…"

From purple all the way to red, he lines up the colors in a rainbow and sprinkles some of the leftover fairy dust that Tenten had left behind when she'd spiked her own shots. "I can't believe I'm doing this…" He lifts the shot glass up, raises it mockingly to Itachi, then downs it in one, the liquid burning a sweet and fiery track down his throat. "Ugh…too sweet…"

Itachi looks at him in concern. "Do you have some sort of allergy to fairy dust?" He had never heard of such a thing, but who knows? It could be possible. "You look like you're in pain."

Sasuke shakes his head, grimacing slightly. "No, it's just too sweet." He hated things that were overly sweet. "When I make it with the intent to drink it, the peach is orange, the yellow is sour lemon, the green is lime instead of watermelon, and the red is cherry, not strawberry."

Unfortunately, that's not the lineup he used for customers, so he was out of luck and wanted to wash out his mouth with whiskey.

"I should have figured that you would like only sour things." Itachi shakes his head in amusement
and smiles at him. "I suppose some vodka might help you wash it down."

"More like Gaara's private stock of Irish whiskey." Sasuke didn't think that vodka was going to cut it. "Happy now? Do you have your proof that I'm not a robot yet?"

Itachi nods at him. "Mhm I suppose that does prove you're not a robot." It was cute when he got that defensive.

"Glad to see we set that straight." Sasuke sighs, leaning back and setting about putting the bottles back. His head felt a little fuzzy, like it always did when Tenten spilled a little fairy dust on him. He'd sometimes wondered if it had the ability to block out another supernatural's powers, but so far, he still had no clue. And then there was the fact that he'd broken the rules and had a drink behind the bar. Gaara wouldn't yell at him for it, but he wouldn't be pleased. Behind the bar, one drink could lead to another, then another, and soon you had an intoxicated bartender giving people way too much alcohol and mixing up drink orders and causing potential legal issues.

"I doubt you'd give away free drinks, even if you were completely trashed." The thought was an amusing one.

"Yeah, probably not, but..." Sasuke's eyes narrow, focusing in on Itachi. There was something...off about him. He'd noticed it since before, but now..."...You read my mind."

"It was obvious what you were thinking." Itachi wouldn't give away his abilities that easily. "I wouldn't worry about it. I doubt your pokerface is that...insignificant when sober."

Amber eyes narrow with suspicion. "I'm not drunk." It would take a lot more alcohol than that to get the job done. Sure, the fairy dust did weird things to him, but he wasn't gone off it.

The man's pride was almost as bad as his father's. There would be no reasoning with him. He'd just have to indulge him. "Of course not." Itachi smiles at him. "Silly me."

Sasuke knew when someone was patronizing him. It was almost too easy at this point. "I'm sure that you have more important things to do than sit around teasing a bartender. Wasn't that fairy offering...companionship for the night?" The word falls sourly from his tongue.

"She's not my match." Itachi's face grows briefly somber. "That and she found hers. It would be a pointless endeavor as lovely as she is."

Her match. Sasuke rubs unconsciously at his left arm. "Hn. Soulmates?" A fat lot of good that did him. "If it works out, that's great, if not, then she'll be like all the others whose 'fated match' never worked out."

Itachi didn't know what to say to that. He was so young to be so damn cynical. "With an attitude like that, one has to be impressed that you manage to haul yourself out of bed every morning." Granted he thought at least some of the soulmate thing was exaggerated by those who were just happy to be in love, but still.

More impressive than Itachi seemed to realize, but Sasuke wouldn't say that out loud in the middle of the bar. "Then it's a good thing I sleep past noon. Being a bartender means I'm up until four in the morning nowadays."

"Ah yes." Itachi chuckles at him. "That does explain quite a bit."

Sasuke sighs, shifting on the balls of his feet. "...I guess I'm just disillusioned. I didn't mean that people shouldn't look forward to finding their soulmate one day. It's just...not a good idea to hold
onto too many expectations. You'll just be disappointed if you do."

They all got that way from time to time. Though it was easy to see that something had happened to him. Itachi didn't need his mind reading powers to realize that.

"So…I guess..." Sasuke smiles sadly, but sincerely, a lead weight pressing on his heart. "I hope that you find yours someday, and that they make you happy. More than offers from fairies or teasing ace bartenders ever did."

"I don't know I'm quite enjoying my time with both parties." He winks at him.

The smile brightens just a tiny bit and Sasuke lets out a quiet laugh. "You've got to be some kind of masochist if you go to a bar, get drunk, and decide to spend your time after turning down company from a fairy teasing me. You could probably have any man or woman in this place keep you company tonight, and yet..." He gestures across the bar. "Somehow, you've ended up here again, teasing me about my android status and virtual chastity belts."

Itachi shrugs gracefully as if the choice was obvious. "Easy sex may be fun and entertaining for a short time, but the novelty wears off quickly." He smiles. "Not to say I don't enjoy such things as much as the next man, but...if it's not going to go anywhere, I'd prefer not to waste both parties' time."

Sasuke's eyes widen, then he nods in agreement. "Yeah, I would probably have that same philosophy. I...don't make friends very easily, but the ones I do have, I know I'll have for the rest of my life. And if I could have a lover...I imagine that it would be the same."

He nods at that. "I understand." Itachi wasn't sure what else to say. "Well, perhaps now that you're feeling better you'll be more inclined to look."

"Right." Sasuke scoffs lightly. "I think a prerequisite for having a lover is having sexual desire for them. No one arouses me, not even porn stars. I've seen plenty of attractive people, but not one has stirred a desire for sex in me. So if someone wanted to be my lover, they'd have to get over that decade old hurdle." And somehow, he doubted that was going to happen anytime soon.

"I think that's more a mental block than an issue of physical attraction." Itachi didn't like where his thoughts were going. "If you're happy with your current single status though, there's no reason to be concerned about it."

Sasuke frowns slightly, but takes a break to think about it as an order for a large round of beer comes in. A mental block? He'd hit puberty about...ten years ago as far as he could figure. Maybe eleven. But...what did Itachi mean by a mental block? He'd never felt sexual desire, and he'd heard it described before. So he understood it in his head, just not with his body. It was a strange thing to think about. Like...someone who'd been vegetarian their whole life wondering about the taste of meat.

He fills up the glasses with beer, handing them off to the man who'd come up to the counter for them. Then he sidles back along the bar to his place in front of Itachi. "I'm fine with my status, but what do you mean by a mental block?"

"We don't know each other that well." He smiles at him. "So I'm not really sure if it's my place to speculate much further on a clearly sensitive topic for you."

"Well, you seem to enjoy reading my mind anyway, so why not?" Sasuke rolls his eyes. It's not like he didn't know how to keep his real secrets locked up tight. "And you're the only person other than
Gaara who's ever brought it up. He doesn't talk about feelings very much."

"Yes, that's a vampire thing." He sighs and shakes his head. "Well, it's obvious that you were hurt a great deal in your past. So you're simply...you'd rather be alone than risk going through something like that again."

Sasuke blinks once, twice, then picks up a few dirty glasses and puts them away to be cleaned.

"Well, you're not entirely wrong." Anyone who looked hard enough could probably see that his head had been all messed up. "I certainly panic whenever people come onto me." It was only ever bad with men, though, the women were mostly just annoying unless they swarmed him. But there was one thing that stood out as a challenge to Sasuke. "But there's one hole in your theory. I've still never felt the desire to have sex with anyone, regardless of my conscious desire to or not to be involved with someone."

"There are other ways of being hurt besides romantically." Itachi shakes his head.

Sasuke's face pales slightly, but he covers it by turning around to grab a couple more bottles of vodka to replace the ones that had been used for shots. "...Yeah." He reaches up to the very top shelf, standing on tiptoe and stretching like a cat to make sure his fingers clasped the bottles firmly.

Itachi watches with appreciation as his hand twitches a bit. That was a nice posterior. One that practically begged to be smacked, but even now...he knew that was a bad idea. Sasuke would try to kill him and while he was a mind-reader and quite proficient at self-defense, Itachi didn't want to engage in a bar fight while the effects of fairy dust were still lingering in his system. That didn't mean that he couldn't admire the view though.

Bouncing back down on the balls of his feet, Sasuke flips the bottles around, catching them deftly as he sets them down on the bar. "I'd offer you a shot, but you've already got way too much shit in your system." And he smirks slightly at the thought of Itachi's reaction in the morning. Fairy dust could be extremely potent. "Though when you wake up tomorrow, I guarantee that you'll decide to be very cautious in the future when looking for easy distractions."

"You're taking entirely too much pleasure in my impending misery." Itachi winks at him. "One would think you were a sadist at this rate, but I know that I must have done something to piss you off tonight. I'm just not sure what."

Sasuke's eyes narrow slightly, then he smirks and leans across the bar. "You said I couldn't hold my alcohol." Petty? Maybe, but Sasuke didn't care. It hurt his pride, so he was hitting back. And if that meant hitting below the belt, so be it. It certainly wouldn't be the first time.

That was it? Man, this was a sensitive bartender. Really? "Oh yes, I believe that I did say that." Itachi laughs softly and shakes his head.

"You also goaded me into taking a shot on my shift." Which Sasuke was also pissed about but he rolls his eyes instead. "And then I felt you staring at my ass."

"Also true and I won't deny that." Most people probably stared at that ass though. "I suppose when you put it that way, I might be somewhat worthy of your ire."

Well, it's not like his ire had anywhere else to go. For now, anyway. Sasuke sighs and shakes his head, examining the dilated state of Itachi's pupils in smoky black eyes. "You're definitely getting a cab." Itachi wasn't even in a fit state to walk home like this without running the risk of wandering off somewhere. First, though, Sasuke fills up a glass of water as he presses a button under the bar to place a call to the closest cab company. "Here, drink this." He slides the glass across the bar,
leaving it in front of the royal pain in his ass.

"Yes, Sir!" Itachi gives him a mock salute as he begins sipping his water. "Lieutenant Sexy Grumpy Ass, Sir!"

Sasuke's eye twitches, and he has to restrain himself to keep from acting on the urge to smack Itachi upside the head. Lieutenant Sexy Grumpy Ass? Really? "And here I thought you were supposed to be the responsible one." He was more annoying than his cousin had been last night. He was so lucky that Sasuke hadn't felt like recording this and putting it online. Though he'd still have to deal with the foggy memories of tonight, and it would just get worse for him as the fog cleared by afternoon.

Itachi chuckles. It was just so amusing to watch his put out expression. Like a wet cat or something. "It's accurate." He winks at him. "You know that you can't deny it."

The amber eyes roll once more and Sasuke notes the button lighting up again. "Right. Your cab is here. Be sure to get at least eight hours of sleep, and drink lots of water in the morning. You're going to need it."

"You're no fun." Itachi sighs as he puts his glass back down and heads for the door.

Sasuke shakes his head, snorting softly. "No... you're just out of your mind on fairy dust." Maybe... Itachi would be better conversation the next time.
Shisui had to admit that even though he'd enjoyed his trip to heaven with the fairies, it was nothing compared to the sheer sadistic pleasure he got from seeing Itachi, his prim, proper, and always composed cousin sleeping off the effects of fairy dust after a little too much indulgence last night. He probably should have warned Itachi that you're supposed to pace yourself, but it seemed that his cousin hadn't quite held to that philosophy. And from what he'd heard Itachi raving about when he got home, and a certain Lieutenant Sexy Grumpy Ass, Shisui could put together roughly what went down.

And damn, he wished he'd gotten a video of it.

Instead, he puts the glass of water on the bedside table next to Itachi's head, then runs his fingers through his cousin's messy raven hair. "Time to rise and shine, Itachi. It's eleven in the morning."

Itachi promptly flips him off and goes back to sleeping. Soft, regal snoring is heard as he snuggles closer to the sheets. He'd get up when he was good and ready. Shisui could just shut the fuck up for now.

Shisui chuckles, rubbing a little more vigorously as he messes up Itachi's hair. "So, I take it that your attempts to seduce the bartender failed, then?"

Itachi chucks a pillow at him. "Quiet." It was annoying that he had failed, but even more so that Shisui was going to taunt him about it.

Oh boy, the emotions that Shisui was getting off his cousin were, for one, unrestrained, and two, rather worrying. There was embarrassment, shame, regret, dissatisfaction, and…just a touch of remorse. "…Itachi…what happened?" His touch softens, combing Itachi's hair down his back just the way he knew his cousin liked it.

He glares at him and shakes his head. Nope. He wasn't going to do this now. He was going to go back to sleep and he grumbles as much to his cousin.

Another soft chuckle escapes Shisui's lips, then he presses them to Itachi's head. "Alright. I'll be out in the kitchen when you want to talk about it." Because knowing his cousin, eventually, he would. Rising from the bed, Shisui pulls the covers back over Itachi and tucks him in, the door sliding silently shut behind him as he retreats from the room.

Itachi drifts back to sleep for a few more hours before finally pulling himself out of bed at around three. It was humiliating to sleep in that late. The day was more than half over now, but he makes his way to the kitchen and pours himself a glass of water.

And as promised, Shisui is waiting in the living room across from the kitchen, holographic
projectors up as he works on their case. He'd put in some requests for information already, and was working on putting together a more solid profile on just what they were dealing with. He'd also found a picture of their kid cousin, and he had to admit…he'd been a cute kid. It was a shame that he was either dead or grew up to be a killer, because he was sure that Sasuke would have had people flocking to him, begging for dates.

He glances up, watching Itachi down the tall glass of water. Yeah, he remembered that part of the morning after. The dehydration could be killer if you forgot to have a few glasses of water afterward. But judging by the state of him, Shisui could pretty well guess that Alex had sat Itachi down and made him drink some water before he came home in the cab. "Feeling better?"

"A bit." Itachi nods at him until he sees the image and sighs. "Maybe I should get more fairy dust." This was the hardest case that he had ever been on.

"Considering how you came home last night, I'd probably skip the fairy dust if I were you." Shisui had a good reaction, sure, but Itachi just seemed…off. "I do need you at least semi-functional. You're the telepath."

"Right." Itachi sighs and shakes his head. "I probably should have selected an easier vocation." One that was less traumatizing.

Shisui looses a self-deprecating laugh. "Well, we wouldn't be Uchihas if we did." Everyone in their family was expected to excel. And, if nothing else, their cousin was excelling at being a killer. "Come on, it can't be that bad. What did you do last night that has your emotions all tangled up?"

"Nothing too horrible." He shrugs. "I got caught ogling and it's obvious his sex drive is nonexistent."

"Hm…I wonder why…" Sure, there were some people who just didn't go for sex, Shisui knew that, but something about the vague reads he'd gotten from Alex's emotions seemed a bit…off. "Though I can't blame you for staring, he's gorgeous, I'll definitely give him that."

True, but apparently that was as far as he was getting. Which was just as well. Itachi knew he wouldn't be in Canada forever. "Yes, well moving on." Itachi shakes his head. "We have more important things to discuss."

Right, down to business, then. "I've put together everything you've said about him, as well as everything I could figure out from the way he treats his victims." Shisui throws a picture of a ten-year-old Sasuke on the screen. "He's got at least a dozen female victims, but they're in the minority in terms of cases we can associate with him. Generally, he treats the women better than the men, but even then, he seems to choose different levels of punishment based on an unknown criteria or principle. The priest, and Gato are in the second highest tier, along with several other victims, all male, all older, but…" He brings up a picture of Danzo. "There was never as much rage expended on them as there was on Danzo Shimura. His body was by far the most mutilated. None of the others suffered nearly as much before their death as he did."

Well, that wasn't very surprising. "It would be difficult to make someone suffer more than Danzo did at the end." That level of brutality would truly take a genius to even dream of. Much less actually enact. "So he has somewhat of a soft spot for women or perhaps he just doesn't associate them with his slavery as much as men."

"Those were my thoughts." And Shisui's thoughts took even darker turns during his investigations. He hoped he was wrong, he really, truly did. "Considering that he was likely sold to Orochimaru, it's safe to assume that he would have blamed Danzo and Orochimaru, both men, for his trauma.
Some of the victims might be projection, but there's clearly something else at work here. Some of his victims have no connection to Danzo, Orochimaru, the medical or scientific fields, or really any crimes of any kind as far as I can tell. Clean records for at least thirty of them, not even a DUI or a minor misdemeanor. There should have been no reason for anyone to kill them." Which is what perplexed Shisui so much. "On the other hand, he's gone after mafia, cartel, triads, other serial killers and traffickers of all kinds. Few of them got the same sort of treatment as either of our top two tiers of punishment."

"Honestly, I think that those with the clean records were just better at not getting caught." He shakes his head. "The man is clearly many things, but insane isn't one of them. He's not playing by the law, but he isn't just murdering anyone that he has a chance to."

And that was another possibility that had crossed Shisui's mind. "But that still brings into question how he's getting his information. Most of these people have nothing in common. They live in different cities, different countries, speak different languages, have different jobs and socioeconomic status. There's no pattern in ethnicity, though a large number of the murders are focused in North America, that might just be because of ease of access. But that still doesn't explain how he's targeting such a random assortment of people."

He obviously was getting info from somewhere. Itachi just didn't see how. Without criminal records, these people wouldn't show up as potential hits in government databases. "Maybe he's...not choosing his targets persay." He frowns as a possibility occurs to him. "Some of the targets got easier deaths than others, implying a degree of detachment. "He travels a great deal. He'd need funds to do that." He didn't like the thought of it, but it did make sense. "Perhaps he's a bounty hunter of some kind?" It sounded ridiculous on his own tongue, but it held a ring of truth to it.

A bounty hunter would explain a lot, but there was one thing that occurred to Shisui that might make it more difficult to pin him down. "But if he can hide in the shadows, then he wouldn't need funds to travel. He could stow away on flights without anyone being the wiser."

"True, but eventually he would need to eat and things of that nature." He shakes his head. "He can't hide in the shadows forever."

"Which means that he has a stash of funds, either in cash or not under his own name." Which would make it a challenge to track down, but maybe not impossible. If they could identify Sasuke through what he looked like now by ageing up his photo, then maybe they'd get a hit or two.

"Though there's also the possibility that someone's been hiding him for the last few years, and they're who's been providing him with food, shelter, and the means to travel."

That's true. It could be any one of his clients or a friend or something. That wasn't particularly encouraging though. "Well, what do you suggest?" He might as well have been a ghost really.

"I was about to start running Sasuke's face through a few programs to get a sense of what he might look like as an adult. But he disappeared before puberty, so it's going to be difficult to determine how his hormones might have acted on him and how his bone structure might have matured." But if there was one thing that wasn't going to change much, it was going to be those eyes. A deep, shining onyx sparkling with innocence and happiness. Except that now, Shisui would bet that those onyx eyes were spitting sparks of rage and vengeance. Still, they were striking, and a key feature in identifying him.

Itachi nods as he watches the machine. He already knew all that of course. He wasn't going to comment on it because it was too depressing to think about. Well other than the other. "How long will it take?" He looks at him.
"Hm…well…” Shisui wasn't too sure, since he was running it through multiple programs with varying amounts of influence based on portraits of Mikoto and Fugaku. "It shouldn't take too long to come up with a dozen or so images, but the accuracy really depends on whether he takes more after his mother or his father. When he was a kid, he looked a lot like Mikoto, but after hitting puberty, Fugaku's genes might have had more of an impact on him. So it's going to be hard to say which image is the most likely candidate…"

One of the programs beeps, spitting out an image of a stern-looking twenty-four year old with a furrowed brow, strong jaw, and lean, powerful build. A second follows shortly thereafter, spitting out a picture of an androgynous youth, almost feminine in appearance, slender, and on the shorter side. They were the most extreme of the compilations, the first featuring heavy influence from Fugaku, and the other from Mikoto.

Shisui looks at them and frowns, neither of them…really seeming quite right for Sasuke's face. "Itachi, what do you think?"

"I think the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle." He shakes his head. "If Sasuke really took that much after Mikoto in his youth, it's doubtful that he shifted completely into favoring Fugaku." He sighs. "Though aging probably would make his father's influence more noticeable."

"Yeah…that was my thought as well." Shisui was just trying to cover all his bases. "Hm…maybe..." He pushes the renderings off onto another screen, opening up a new profile, and starting with the base picture, slowly ageing him up, keeping a greater Mikoto influence, but adding in a little strength around the curve of his jaw, the shape of his ears, and the straight angle of his nose. And slowly, a photo comes to life of a stunningly attractive young man who wouldn't look at all out of place as a model in a high-end online magazine.

Itachi chuckles and shakes his head. "Well assuming that's accurate, it's a shame he's a serial killer." He had missed another calling. Being an actor or a model.

"Yeah…" Shisui frowns at the image, a few dark thoughts jumping to mind. "…If he skipped the awkward phase like we did, then I imagine he went from being a cute kid to a gorgeous teenager." And Orochimaru had hold of him the entire time. It left a bad taste in his mouth. Especially when he looked into those deep, knowing eyes. It was as though the image was coming to life right before his eyes. It just felt so…alive. Sasuke felt alive. "…It sucks that he might be this beautiful. It's always easier to bring in the bad guys when they're ugly bastards." Maybe it wasn't fair, but Shisui always felt bad arresting pretty people, especially if they looked innocent. Still, he had a job to do…

"You really shouldn't judge a book by its cover." Itachi shakes his head. "That habit will get you killed one day, if you're not careful."

"I know." Shisui sighs, leaning back in his chair. "He's a killer, and we have to treat him as such. Whoever Sasuke was when he was a kid…he's clearly not that person anymore." Which was a real shame, Shisui would have loved to have gotten to know his baby cousin, not be the one here to arrest him. "Well, we have an idea as to what he looks like. So now we just have to catch him before he murders a scientist." One that they might also have to bring in to face some serious investigation.

Itachi wasn't entirely opposed to letting him have Orochimaru. Though they did have a job to do. As much as it sucked, he knew that.

The screen beeps again, a message popping up in the corner. Shisui clicks on it, his eyes flicking back and forth across the screen as the words are branded into his brain. "…We have a location on
Orochimaru." Or at least, they would in a few days. "He's overseas right now, but he'll be flying back into the country on Tuesday. He's been in Japan, India, Russia, and Italy for...business and research opportunities. He'll land at Calgary International Airport at four in the afternoon, coming in through a connection in Montreal from Rome."

"Very well." Itachi didn't like it, but they had to at least try. "We're on the case."

"Absolutely not." This is why Sasuke wasn't into girls. Whether it was hair or makeup or clothes... there was always some sort of obsession with their looks that freaked him out. Especially when Temari tried it on him. "I would sooner ask for racing stripes and permanent streaks than let you near ANY part of me with a piercing needle."

"Oh don't be a big baby." Temari rolls her eyes. "It's just earrings. I did consider a nipple ring, but figured that wasn't your thing."

Right, like that was going to happen. Sure, Sasuke knew very well that Temari had quite the tenure as a beautician and knew her way around hair, piercings, and tattoos like no one else, but he still wasn't fond of the idea of having a vampire drawing his blood. Even if she was a friendly vampire who doted on him like he was her little brother, she could be a little...intense sometimes. "I'm not being a baby, I just don't think that I should be wasting time on piercings and tattoos, or whatever else you feel like doing to me in your head right now." He was at a pretty critical point right now, Orochimaru would be returning to the country soon, and he needed to be ready to strike.

He could be such a baby sometimes. "Very well." She'd try again later. She wouldn't be thwarted that easily.

Sasuke narrows his eyes as he finally sits down on one of the chairs in the back room. They'd be opening in a few hours, so he had more than enough time to relax. "I can hear you plotting, you know." Sure, he wasn't a telepath, but it was no secret that Temari was always plotting something.

"Yeah." She nods at him as if to say, 'So?' "What are you going to do about it?" He wouldn't do nothing and they both knew it.

"Steal one of your ponytails while you sleep?" Sasuke closes his eyes as he imagines her everlasting fury if he did that. It would be worth whatever she did just to see the look on her face. He could totally get one up on the old vampire if she provoked him.

"You wouldn't dare!" Anything, but the hair!

"Then don't come at me with a needle unless I ask you to." Not that Sasuke had never considered earrings, he just... If he survived all this, the once Orochimaru was dead and it was time to disappear, maybe then he'd be ready to let go and see a few permanent changes. For now, he wanted to stay himself. That way, Orochimaru would get to see the full glory of the monster he'd created.

She grumbles and shakes her head. "You really should have let the detective screw you." He needed to get laid and badly. "You need to loosen up. Big time."

Sasuke bites his lip, eyes opening just a little as he tilts his head onto his shoulder. "I doubt he'd enjoy me very much." He didn't know what the appropriate reactions were. People talked about moaning and screaming, but he didn't really see how either of those were supposed to be sexy at all.

Wonderful. Now she had stepped into a can of worms. The boy did have some serious issues. All
understandable of course. "You don't give yourself enough credit in that regard." She smiles at him. "Trust your instincts."

"You mean the same instincts that tell me to kill people?" Because Sasuke really didn't see how that was going to help. "…Wait, he's a detective?"

"Different instincts from those." Temari sighs, but she nods. "Yes, I thought you knew. I mean you talked to him for two nights."

"Yeah, two nights, not two months." He hadn't exactly gotten into a conversation about Itachi's job when the man was here the first time, or when he was drunk on fairy dust. "…And somehow, you don't think that a detective fucking a serial killer would be a disaster?" Sasuke couldn't see that sort of thing ending well, not even in a movie.

"He's smart, but you're smarter." She shrugs. "Plus maybe if he rocked your world enough, you'd retire." Which would frankly be a relief.

"…Not yet." Sasuke still had one thing left to do before he could have any kind of peace. "First, the monster who created me has to die. I refused to stay chained to the memories of him, and the only way to break them is by killing him." Once the snake was dead, Sasuke would be free. "Though I guess, when he's dead, you can do whatever you like to me." Anything that didn't involve pink, anyway.

Well, that was progress. "Alright." She nods at him. "Well, I should be heading home. Shikamaru is probably wondering where I am now." He was thinking of a future at least in the abstract. That was something.

"Alright." Sasuke had forgotten that Temari wasn't working the door tonight. She got the weekends off, and Gaara had a giant friend who worked the door on nights when Temari was in bed with Shikamaru. "Say hi to Shika for me." The lazy vampire was certainly something. As much of a genius as Sasuke supposedly was, and as lazy as a sloth. Sasuke was pretty sure the man had been a koala in his second last life, before being human or vampire.

"I will." She winks at him as she takes off. "Best not to keep him waiting or he'll complain I'm being a drag."

Sasuke rolls his eyes and pushes himself out of the chair, glancing in the mirror Temari had installed across the back wall of the room. On impulse, he takes out a small case from his pocket, then reaches his fingers to his eyes, popping out one amber iris, then the second. When he looks up again, deep onyx eyes stare back at him. He didn't mind wearing contacts in public, and if he survived all this, then maybe he'd get his eyes done with lasers, make the color change permanent. He really could let Temari pierce his ears too, and use the permanent dye instead of the temporary stuff now drying in his hair. It would certainly make the maintenance a lot easier.

But…it did raise an important question, and one that he didn't really know how to consider. "…Who am I? Sasuke Uchiha? Or Alex Maeda?" The name he clung to? Or the one that was his shield? How was he even supposed to answer that?

He chuckles sadly as he puts the contacts back in, blinking as they settle back into place, amber concealing the onyx perfectly. "I guess I'll find out when Orochimaru is finally dead."

The end was in sight, and Sasuke would push on until his final mission was complete.

Orochimaru clutches his phone closer to his ear as he tries to keep his hands from shaking. "Why
yes, I would be more than willing to find a cure for vampirism, if the funds are available in addition to my other projects, Mr. Sabaku."

Rasa Sabaku was a famous vampire politician and father of three. He was also extraordinarily wealthy as most vampires of his age worth their salt tended to be.

If one lived long enough, usually they learned something about money. "I'd be happy to answer any questions about your potential investment, of course." After all, now that Danzo was dead, he had to be replaced somehow.

A moment of silence reigns, before a low, gravelly voice replies. "Are you other projects for profit, or to further the understanding of the supernatural form?" Rasa was well aware of Orochimaru's many papers. The man had to be the foremost expert in nearly anything to do with supernatural abilities and their manifestation.

"Well, the two aren't mutually exclusive." He drags his tongue along his lower lip in excitement. "Unfortunately, if one wants to study the supernatural form just for the sake of academia, one does need financing from somewhere."

"Of course, I understand." And Rasa knew that research into vampirism was a tenuous proposal at best, and that it was a problem that would take a great deal of research in order to solve. Which is why he'd picked the very best. When he had heard that the scientist had journeyed to Europe, he'd called the man from his estate in Ireland, where he'd returned years after the famine that had driven his already immortal children off to Canada. "I realize that I am asking something rather difficult of you, but when looking for the most unreachable solutions, one must look for the best in their field."

Yes, he would do nicely. Perhaps even more so than Danzo. This man seemed easier to get along with. Which while not a requirement, was always a nice bonus in the unlikely event someone with that much wealth was...sociable. "Yes, I understand completely." He nods. "Of course, you understand it will take a great deal of time to unlock the cure and I do have other projects, but I will give it my best effort."

Rasa sighs, knowing that would be the answer. "Yes. Do not worry...I have all the time in the world." Which was precisely the problem. "Though I imagine that a cure for vampirism will make you a rather wealthy man." After all, he knew of no one who truly wanted to live forever. A few centuries, a few millennia maybe, but not until the end of time. "You will receive the first transfer when the banks open in the morning."

"Wonderful." Orochimaru nods. "Is there anything else that you would like to ask before we conclude our conversation?" He didn't understand why vampires would want to become humans again personally. Probably nostalgia. Who could really say though?

"No, that is all for now. If I have further questions, perhaps I will arrange for a luncheon." Rasa did prefer to conduct his meetings in a more traditional manner, rather than over the phone. But he knew that was the old world vampire in him. "I wish you luck in your endeavors, and hope for a cure in its time."

"Of course. Good evening." Orochimaru smiles into the phone. "I shall as I said, do my best." After all, he was right. There was a good deal of money to be made in a cure for that anyway.
A Pair of Magnolias
Chapter by celestia193

Fairies have long since been the masters of beautiful things. If they sparkle, shimmer, gleam, or shine, then a fairy will know precisely what to do with it. Or…such was Hinata's father's motto when he opened up Hyuga Jewelers almost two hundred years ago. With all of the markets prone to sudden fluctuations, he'd deemed it safest and most profitable to go into jewelry. It had started out modest, but in the last hundred years, had exploded in popularity. The clan of fairies was quite wealthy, to put it mildly.

On the other hand, Hiashi's other motto was 'if you want something done right, do it yourself'. And so, every single branch across the world was managed by a Hyuga. Not that Hinata minded at all. In fact, she often took the opportunity as joint head of the Toronto branch, with her cousin Neji as co-head, to work the front and get a sense for the sorts of trends that might be burgeoning with the customers.

That, and one of the biggest reasons she liked working with people was that it was always a source of joy to see the looks on their faces when they found that perfect piece, whether it be for themselves or someone special. The wedding display was by far her favorite.

She flutters through the many rows of jewel-filled cases, being careful to dodge perusing patrons, and taking special note of any empty places that needed refilling. Those were good indicators of where trends were going, and if something didn't sell, then it would be taken off display and put into storage, its image inserted into the online catalogue.

Well, she could see that the sapphire jewelry was doing well., and so were the opals. Very beautiful, traditional pieces. The emeralds seemed a little slow, but the rubies were starting to pick up. Good, very good.

A soft tinkling bell sounds near the front of the large jewelry store, and Hinata knew that to mean that a new customer would get to be awed and astounded by the wide selection of thirty precious and semi-precious gemstones for every occasion.

Itachi heads into the jewelry shop, half wondering if he should turn around. Sasuke would likely view his idea as a slap in the face, but he had to do something for his cousin. They would be lucky to get him off of death row, but they'd manage it. He just didn't want him to feel alone.

"So I might as well get him something." He wasn't entirely sure if he had actually spoken those words or just thought them loudly, but it mattered little. "Might as well see what they have." It was a beautiful store and even if he didn't end up getting something for Sasuke, it surely couldn't hurt to browse.

The fairy flutters over at the sights of the slightly uncomfortable man who'd just walked in. His uncertainty poured off of him, and he looked half ready to turn back around. So, it was time once again to put her customer service skills to the test. "Hello, Sir." Her wings flutter softly as she lands not far from him, her heels clicking quietly as she saunters towards him. "Are you here to browse, or are you looking for something special?" She smiles, trying to put him at ease as sparkling fairy dust glitters in the air.

It was clever of them to put fairy dust in the air to 'assist' their customers. That or manipulative. Either way a stroke of genius from a business perspective, Itachi decides. After all, he had picked
up on her thoughts.

"A bit of both actually." He smiles at her. "I'm afraid that someone I care about is going through a
tough time and will be going away for a long while." That was generic enough. "So I thought I'd
have a look around."

"Oh, I see." That could be tricky, but if nothing else, Hinata could think on her feet. "Alright, is
there any metal or gemstone you feel would suit this person? We have steel, titanium, sterling
silver, platinum, gold, as well as white gold and rose gold. We have all the most popular and
traditional gems, along with a few exotics."

"Maybe sterling silver and some kind of ruby." He smiles at her. "He's always been fond of rubies."
Well, at least that was the color of his eyes. Itachi really had know way of knowing what kind of
metal or gemstone Sasuke would like.

"Let's see…” If it was for a man, then that helped to narrow it down a little. Hinata could steer him
towards the mens jewelry instead of the larger selections of women's jewelry. "Would you prefer a
ring, bracelet, earrings, or necklace? We have formal and informal pieces in every category."

"Oh I don't really have a preference for that." He pauses. "Though I don't think his ears are pierced,
so no earrings. And bracelets do seem a bit feminine." Itachi smiles at her slyly. "No offense is
intended, of course."

"None taken, though we do have a selection of platinum and titanium bracelets done in less delicate
styles." Not that she would judge any man who liked delicate jewelry. It could be very
aesthetically pleasing. "Let's see…silver and rubies…” She flutters down one of the aisles, heading
for a wall with several display cases built into it. She examined the one with a large selection of
pendants, nodding slightly. "Perhaps one of these, then?"

Among the pendants lay stylized dragons, whirls, and waves of silver. Red gems were cradled by
silvery bodies, wings, inlaid into swords, and even caressed by the cast silver tails of a peacock. All
carefully crafted pieces, and something that Hinata more often sold to a younger crowd, usually
male, but sometimes female.

"They're all glorious." It was no wonder that fairies excelled in the jewelry business. "I'm afraid
that it would be almost impossible for me to choose only one."

"Hm… I see…” Now, how could Hinata help to narrow down the choices… "Well, is there
anything that you feel symbolizes him? Something that speaks about his personality, or his
dreams? His goals? It could even be something as simple as an association with a name or
nickname."

Well, there was one thing. "Freedom is what he desires most." That had to be the reason he did
these killings. He wanted to be free of his tormentors.

Hinata pauses, taking in the implication of the word. "Freedom… I see." There were a great many
people who wanted freedom from something, and some were lucky enough to get it. "In that
case…” She opens up the jewelry case, nimble fingers removing a silver pendant from its
wrappings. An oval ruby, cut and polished without facets sits cradled in two carefully cast silver
angel wings on a silver chain. Within the ruby shone a tiny light, gleaming as she turns to Itachi
with the piece. "Do you think something like this would suit him?"

"I think that it would suit him very much." Itachi smiles at her. "Thank you." The price didn't really
matter to him. He had quite a bit of savings and a trust fund that he hadn't actually touched yet.
Hinata smiles as she wraps it up in the velvet casings. "Alright, I'll ring this up for you." She giggles softly. "Lucky for you that this case is on sale this week." After all, the younger customers loved this section, so sometimes they would put it on sale at certain points during the school year. It was getting close to Christmas, so it was an early sale for those who wanted to get their shopping done a month ahead of time.

Well that was good to know. "Yes, I suppose it's my lucky day." He smiles at her. "So how much is it?"

Normally, this would have been an easy three grand based on the size alone, despite the inclusions carefully hidden by the cabochon style, but the price had been knocked down to barely thirteen hundred, which Hinata thought was quite the deal for a ruby, even with a greater abundance of them available today. "One thousand, three hundred and twenty dollars." Less than half the original price, and quite affordable, considering the size of the gem. "Because the clarity resembles an opal more than a ruby, it couldn't be made into an extremely expensive piece. But I find that the younger customers prefer the clouded gems over the clear ones. And it works out well since they're much cheaper."

"I can do that." He could have handled the full price, but he certainly wasn't going to argue with it being more than half off. "Check, cash, debit, or credit?" He could do any of them.

When they'd first started out, Hinata would have said cash only. But with banks becoming a bit more reliable in recent years, that had changed. "We take cash and debit." Cheques were old, not to mention unreliable, and credit could cause all sorts of problems. Besides, this was a minor piece in the collection, with more flexibility.

He nods and runs his card through the machine. "Thank you. You've been a great help." Sasuke would likely never forgive him, but maybe he'd benefit from realizing his family still cared about him.

Despite the cooling weather, the voices of children could still be heard coming from the playground on Pricefield Road. Sasuke often passed by it on his way to St. Michael's. Sometimes he passed by it without his usual stop at the graveyard. But he always made sure to check in when he had the chance. Kids were vulnerable in places like this, no matter how safe people tried to make them.

So, even if no one knew why he was there, he still made sure to keep watch. Silently and without judgment for the parents so busy that they took their eyes off their children for a moment. After all, that's why he was there, because no parent, no matter how much they cared, could be everywhere at once.

That, and sometimes he'd see something that made him call Social Services, but that had only happened twice, so he was hopeful that everything would be fine today, as it usually was. Still, he sighs as he watches the kids at play, bundled up in fall jackets and boots, running about without a care in the world. They were happy, and he wanted to see that it stayed that way.

When one of them trips over his own feet and falls face-first into the sand, Sasuke frowns. But the frown softens as the boy picks himself back up, brushes off the sand, and sports a wide, slightly embarrassed grin. "Good..." Looked like the kid was fine.

Itachi makes his way out of the jewelry store and was heading home, when he notices something out of the corner of his high. A flash of electric blue that was rather familiar. It couldn't be though. What were the odds? The city was huge. Maybe not quite the size of New York, but Toronto wasn't
"Alex?" Itachi blinks bemusedly as he witnesses a disturbingly touching scene. "Who knew he had a soft spot for children..." Obviously, the grumpy bartender was watching them. There was a certain wishfulness in his expression. Maybe he liked children, but being asexual and single made having them difficult.

Sasuke blinks, then checks over his shoulder to see if he was hearing things and going crazy, or if he'd really heard the voice he thought he had. It was faint, so it was hard to be sure, but his ears had always been rather sharp. "Itachi?" And sure enough, the detective was there. Though why he was there was a mystery.

Mentally slapping himself, Sasuke shakes his head. No, there was no reason that Itachi shouldn't be here. They were pretty close to the business district, so maybe he'd just been out on a case or something and decided to go for a walk while forensics wrapped things up. Or maybe the case was over and he was off duty. Though why he would be at a children's park was a mystery. Sure, he looked old enough to have a kid or two, but he didn't strike Sasuke as someone who had kids. At least...not yet.

"I was beginning to think you never left the sanctity of Onyx." Itachi smiles at him warmly as he strides over. "I have to say I didn't expect you to favor parks, but that is a pleasant surprise."

Sasuke shrugs. "I take walks a lot of nights. But I'm doing them earlier in the day now than I used to thanks to my new schedule. I just thought I'd sit down for a little while." Keep an eye on the kids, make sure that they were safe. "There's a lot of places to go, and it's easy to get yourself lost in a city this size if you want to."

Right. If Alex wanted to deny a soft spot for kids, Itachi would let him. It wasn't really any of his business anyway. "I see." He nods at him. "That makes sense. It is a pretty large city."

"Hn." Sasuke nods slightly, his eyes turning back to the kids as a faint smile curves the corner of his lips. "So, I guess I'm not the only one taking a walk today. What brings you out here, Detective?"

"Oh I was just doing a bit of shopping." He chuckles. "I've finished that for now and was on my way home and then I saw you."

"Good to know that I'm the magnet that brought you here." It was a funny thought. "Getting in on the tourist stuff before you head home after your assignment?" Sasuke smirks. "Because if you haven't hit the CN Tower yet, you should probably do that before you go."

"Haven't really hit it yet." He smiles. "Though I guess you could say that."

Sasuke snorts softly. "...It seems that you've recovered well from your night of fairy dust." A night that he quite vividly remembered as being very...awkward, to put it lightly. "Does that mean you have your head back on straight?"

"More bisexual than straight." He shakes his head in amusement. "Though that's accurate enough." It was embarrassing. "It's probably best to just forget about my less than dignified behavior that night."

Yeah, Sasuke could see why Itachi wanted to have his behavior forgotten about. "Too bad I didn't get a video of it. It would be interesting to see your reaction to what I got to see." He was a very...unique kind of drunk, to say the least. "But I think you've learned your lesson about the power of
fairy dust."

Itachi rubs the back of his head sheepishly and nods. "Oh believe me." He smiles at Alex. "I've definitely learned about the power of that kind of dust."

"Good." Sasuke snickers at Itachi's expression, then props his head up with his elbow, his gaze softening as it falls on the children again. "...But...you did have a few points that I have to admit are...true." Even if he didn't like them. "Just...understand that not everyone's past is pleasant, and mine is one I would much rather forget." He couldn't but that was another matter entirely. "There is a lot of me that's damaged and broken, so...this really is a problem with me, and not with anyone else. So if you were hoping for anything beyond just teasing me..." It hurt that it was something that no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't look forward to. "Besides, there's someone out there waiting for you, I'm sure."

"I would have to be blind, deaf, and dumb not to see that your past isn't a happy one." Itachi's gaze grows more serious. "It doesn't have to define your present or future, but that's your decision to make. If you prefer to be alone, save for bartending until you're old and gray...well, I obviously can't stop you from doing so."

Sasuke laughs scathingly. "I work the bar because Gaara insists that I should try to build a life for myself instead of just...existing." But it was harder than he liked to admit. "I guess I just never understood why life has to be so hard." He didn't like being alone, not really. But it was better for everyone else's sake that he was.

"I've wondered that as well." Especially lately, what with the difficulties presented by his case. "Though I'm told that the bad times are designed to help us appreciate the good ones more."

"That's...a very optimistic way of putting it." The way he was going, Sasuke doubted he'd be able to really appreciate anything good if he got lucky enough for it to come his way. "...You believe in this whole soulmate system, don't you?"

"I'd like to believe in it." Itachi chuckles. "Though I've always been a bit more of a skeptic than my cousin. There's probably a grain of truth to it that gets exaggerated by people who are happy to find each other."

Over the years, Sasuke had come to believe that as well. It was a system where people told tall tales to make it seem nicer than it was. "...Do you think that it's just wishful thinking to hope for someone who could rescue you from your pain? Just...make it all not matter anymore?" He'd believed it as a child. Hoped...dreamed...wished...and it had come to nothing. "It is possible for someone to love you so much that your heart no longer feels like it's being pulled apart piece by piece?" Because he remembered the time his heart was breaking. The loneliness, the sadness, the excruciating pain. And he could still feel its echoes, even now.

Itachi was half tempted to see what had caused this much agony in someone who was likely still shy of their 25th birthday. He wouldn't though. He'd respect Alex's privacy. "It might be wishful thinking." Itachi smiles at him. "Though isn't that what gets us out of bed in the morning? If you don't know the answer for sure, there's no harm in hoping."

"...Yeah." Sasuke sighs, his heart sinking, producing a familiar, throbbing ache. "I suppose it was wishful thinking..." The naive hopes of a child wanting a happy future. "...You once asked me how I got out of bed in the morning with this attitude. It's because I have to. Otherwise I'll just fade away."

"I said that it might be." Itachi sighs as he kisses his cheek. "Not that it was definitely merely
wishful thinking. Instinct is a powerful thing, and as we get older we try to replace what we know as children with rationalizations for why we can't have it." He smiles at Alex. "Whether that includes a soulmate or not, if you truly wanted it you could find some form of happiness."

Sasuke blinks, eyes widening slightly upon feeling the brush of Itachi's lips against his cheek. A bright burst of surprise shoots through him, and he scoots down the bench, not at all sure what to do about...about...THAT. "You just-

He hadn't expected that reaction. "It was just a kiss on the cheek." Surely, even Alex couldn't consider that too lewd. "Your emotions were just pouring off of you. I wanted to comfort you."

Wait, what? "My emotions were..." But Sasuke always dampened them, hiding them from psychics who might be in the area. Sure, he got a bit emotional on the inside, but..."...You are a psychic after all..." He'd been right. He must have been right. And Sasuke's first instinct was to lock everything up tight again, letting nothing escape the prison of his mind.

"It's not something I advertise for obvious reasons." Itachi sighs as he gives Alex a wistful smile. "Though sometimes I do put my foot in my mouth. I wasn't trying to read you." Wonderful. He probably thought that Itachi was invading his privacy. "I didn't see anything specific. Your emotional intensity was just...screaming."

For a few seconds, Sasuke wants to scream. Instead, he settles on a self-deprecating laugh as he rubs his left arm self-consciously. "...See? This is why I fucking hate psychics... Even if there's no intention to invade people's privacy, somehow we always end up doing it anyway..."

"Well, if your emotions weren't so loud then it wouldn't be an issue." Wait. That was it. "Let me see your hand." He had only once felt emotional intensity like that before and that was just before he and Shisui received this assignment. Could his 'match' actually be Alex?

Sasuke frowns as he holds up his left hand. After all, no one ever got to see his right. "My hand?" What was this about? "I'm not a telepath, Itachi. Why do you want my hand?"

"You implied you had psychic abilities, but that's not the point." He shakes his head and pulls on Sasuke's left hand. It was the one he touched when he'd thought about soulmates, so it wasn't hard to put together. "I want to see if we're a match." So he rolls up Alex's sleeve, frowning slightly at the sight of makeup there. But he wipes it away, revealing the beautiful petals one by one. It was another magnolia. Never before had he been taunted by a damn flower. "This is going to prove complicated given your aversion to all things romantic."

Amber eyes widen in shock, then his gaze drops to his lap, a sinking feeling in his stomach. He was never supposed to meet the one with the magnolia. But the way Itachi was looking at it...there was no doubt. "...I'm sorry." His existence had just made things very complicated for Itachi. "...If you're disappointed, I understand. Some people just aren't good soulmate material."

"Well disappointed that you seem to want very little to do with me, but not in you, yourself." Itachi sighs as he embraces him. "The emotional whiplash is...extreme, but I'm not upset about that."

"You're not..." Sasuke stares over Itachi's shoulder, a little dazed by the sudden onslaught of affection, no matter how minor someone else might consider it. His emotions were a blur, incoherent and indistinct, but there was just something warm about Itachi, something comforting, like from a long-forgotten memory. He had to say something. Anything. "...And you don't mind the blue hair?" ...He mentally smacked himself. Really?

"I didn't match with your hair." Itachi smiles at him wryly. "I matched with your soul, but I quite
like the blue. I imagine that you'd look good with most colors though, but I wouldn't recommend pink or orange."

At that, Sasuke shivers, but laughs quietly. "Or yellow. I don't want to look like a bee." Itachi was...okay. He wasn't running away. "Well, that's good, I guess. Temari's been bugging me to let her dye it permanently." Not to mention the piercings...and at some point, he expected her to try and talk him into letting her give him a tattoo.

"You should let your hair be whatever color you like best." He smiles.

"Hm..." Sasuke took a few seconds to think about it, for the first time actually considering what he'd let Temari do once he was all done and ready to move on. "Well, the blue is actually growing on me. But now she's bugging me about letting her pierce my ears. Not that I have anything against needles or anything, I've just...never really considered much body modification until recently."

And a particular part of that conversation suddenly came to mind. "She also mentioned nipple rings, but decided not to because of my...aversion." It was on the embarrassing side, but..."What do you think about that sort of thing? Body modifications, I mean."

"It depends on what kind of modification." Itachi smiles at him serenely. "It's never really been my thing, but earrings are fine and nipple rings could be fun, but I wouldn't get them for myself so I wouldn't ask someone else to get them." He pauses realizing body modifications ran the gambit. "Dyed hair it just depends, but I don't have any objections to it. I generally would advise most to avoid plastic surgery, but that's a personal choice."

Hm, so flexible on that. Not that Sasuke planned on going in for plastic surgery anytime soon, but...he seemed pretty accepting of the practice. To him, it seemed like it might just be a case by case basis of what looked attractive on who, more than modifications on principle. "I see..." Maybe Sasuke could work with that. "What about tattoos?"

"Well obviously, I have two of my own as everyone does." The other man shrugs gracefully. "Within reason. If you intend on tattoo everything, well I'd oppose that. Though some look good on people. Location is important though..."

Sasuke rolls his eyes. Of course everyone had two, but beyond that, some people just really didn't like them. Hell, some people didn't like the ones on their arms either. He'd seen some extremely picky people before. "No full-body tattoos. I don't think Temari would agree to do that, even if I wanted her to, so there's no need to get all uppity about me using every inch of skin as a canvas." But Sasuke did agree about the within reason part. "If I considered it, I would definitely be picky about the location." If he did...probably his lower back, or the backs of his shoulders, maybe the small of his back...those were all good location candidates if he decided to let her go ahead with what was sure to be her next request after piercings.

"I wasn't getting uppity." What century did Alex believe he was living in? "Merely making a joke." Uppity? "Anyway, anything I should know that you're against? I'm not likely to change my appearance much."

"Hm..." Should Sasuke fuck with him? Or just be honest? He smirks slightly. "Long-ass hair?" He knew he was being a little turd, but it was just too tempting not to.

Itachi shakes his head in amusement. "My hair isn't that long." He smirks at Sasuke, not falling for it. "If you believe it is, wait till you see my father."

"Really?" Okay, that was interesting. Sasuke didn't think a lot of people did that much anymore.
Then again...he'd seen some very odd hairstyles coming and going through Onyx. "But your's is like..." He glances behind Itachi, measuring the ponytail with his eyes. "That's got to be like two feet long." It was halfway down his damn back. It...kind of reminded him of Haku, now that he thought about it.

"You're exaggerating." Itachi smiles and kisses his forehead. "Besides, I've never really had anyone complain about my hair."

Sasuke's fingers fly to his forehead, rubbing there bewilderedly. "Fine, a foot and a half." But seriously, Sasuke couldn't imagine being that patient. It must have taken years. "And I'm not...complaining about it." Not really, he just wanted to be annoying. "It...looks really soft." And silky, and gently shiny. And...he felt like a child. "But, um...no, not really. I don't have any hard limits when it comes to what other people do to their bodies, as long as they're not stupid about it."

It was sweet. His fascination. "I don't usually do this, but since you're curious...I don't mind." He undoes the tie of his hair and lets his mane just fall wherever he wanted it to. Which was well, almost everywhere really.

Amber eyes widen as pale fingers gingerly reach out to run slowly through the raven black strands. "...It's so soft..." It was almost like airy silk running through his fingers. Each strand was so light, it felt so nice against his calloused fingers.

"I'm glad you like it." Itachi smiles at him and does his best not to laugh. "Good hair tends to run in my family."

"Clearly." Sasuke's fingers move slowly, gathering it all back into a ponytail, just like before. "You probably know this, but most women would kill to have your hair."

That was true. Sometimes it was a little scary actually. How much women envied his hair. "I'm aware of that." He smiles at him. "I suppose it's a good thing I have you here to protect my hair now."

Sasuke nods absentmindedly. "Yeah..." He certainly could do that. Protect Itachi. Maybe...when this was all over, he'd have something to do. Something...to live for. "I'll protect you."

Itachi wasn't really sure what 'this' was, but apparently Alex had something important on his mind. He didn't want to pry though. They had barely established trust over, of all things, hair care. He didn't want to violate that. "Especially from scissors." He snorts at that. "It would take awhile for me to grow all this back, if it was cut by some jealous harlot."

A small smile curls Sasuke's lips. "Yeah." It quickly morphs into a smug smirk. "I'll protect you from the scary scissors, don't you worry. And I'll protect you from all the jealous women in the world." He was so glad that he didn't really have to worry about that. Since...apparently what Temari was most jealous of was his complexion.

"That is a full time vocation I'm afraid." He was cute when he was smug. "Though I do appreciate it all the same." He presses his lips against Alex's in a gentle kiss.

Sasuke stayed stock still, startled by the sudden contact. But he stayed there instead of fleeing, but only because he felt just a tiny burst of warmth somewhere in his chest. He didn't feel threatened...not now. He felt...safe.

A simple kiss was enough to rock Alex to his core. This was going to take some work, but that was fine. Itachi wasn't in a particular hurry. Though if this was going to go anywhere in the long-term
one of them would have to move. "I like the contacts." Itachi smiles at him. "Maybe one day, I'll know your real eye color."

"What?" Sasuke leans back, stomping down his panic in a heartbeat. "How…did you know that they were contacts?"

"There's a faint shimmering when I'm up close." He chuckles. "I have good eyesight. Your secret is safe with me. I assume you wear them as part of your 'uniform' for the club."

"…Yeah, and in public." After all, he had reasons for not letting people see his eyes. They were very distinct and could give him away to the wrong people. "But…one day, I'll show you what my eyes really look like." He could do that much for his soulmate, at least. "I promise."

It was going to rain soon. So that was as good an excuse as any. Granted, he knew that he was pushing his luck, but Itachi was nothing if not bold. "I look forward to that day." He smiles at the other man. "It seems we have a lot to talk about. Would you like to go back to your place maybe?" He couldn't really show him his place.

Sasuke tilts his head, then looks up at the sky, noting the clouds coming together overhead. Well, if you could say one thing about Canada, it was this. It could be sunny in the morning, cloudy at noon, raining half the afternoon away, and sunny again by evening. When he'd lived in Vancouver, it had been even worse sometimes. "…Yeah, sure." After all, what didn't they need to talk about?
Chapter 9

Chapter by celestia193

Sasuke waves his hand over the scanning pad, opening the door to the small apartment that Gaara had insisted he rent with the very decent wages he was starting to make at the bar. Most employers wouldn't pay their workers a month's wages up front, but he knew Gaara had done it both to make sure that he was sufficiently set up so that he could get his own place, as well as to guilt Sasuke into staying to complete all of the shifts the money was for. The vampire could be sneaky like that.

Still, now that he actually had someone coming over and looking at his apartment, he felt a little self-conscious about how very little was in it. Sure, it was properly furnished, with everything he needed for food, laundry, and sleeping. But there were no pictures on the grey-blue walls, no bookcases stuffed into corners, nothing that really identified who lived here now unless you went right into his closet. And even then, most of his clothes had been acquired and stuffed in there by Temari.

As he steps inside, he takes off his heavier jacket, hanging it on a hook next to the door. "Uh…welcome, I guess." That was a bit awkward. "Sorry, I don't really entertain guests much outside of the bar."

"It's alright." Itachi looks around curiously. "Were you in the military or something?" It was rather bare. Though that was fine. It wasn't as though more stuff couldn't be acquired and there was no senseless clutter to worry about.

Sasuke shoots him a scathing look. "Do I LOOK like I was in the military?"

"Well you don't now." He chuckles. "Though there is nothing that prevents former military members from dying their hair and getting contacts."

Sasuke wasn't sure whether to laugh, or to tell Itachi to go get his head checked. "Or something. I was never in the military. I think they'd kick me out for my cheek, or my attitude, or for my inability to follow orders."

"Yes, that would be a problem." Itachi nods thoughtfully. "Though you could have become more rebellious after leaving the military."

For a minute, Sasuke just stares in wonder at his apparently very insistent soulmate. Soulmate…that was going to take some getting used to. "You're very attached to the idea that I might have been in the military. Is that a…fetish or something?"

"Well, it's just that your home is so…orderly." He didn't know how else to explain it. "You've also got a temper. So that makes me think military." That didn't mean that he had a fetish though. "But not really, but I'm sure that you would fill out a uniform well." He'd likely look even better taking it off though.

Oh…"It's a new apartment." Sasuke shrugs, shaking off a few creeping thoughts. "I don't really have much to put in it. I've been…on the road for a long time."

"Ah. It's the same at our apartment." He decides to clarify before Alex got the wrong idea. "Shisui and I are sharing one while on assignment."

Sasuke nods slightly. "Right…is he going to be okay with you being here? I mean, he might
wonder where you got off to." And Sasuke really didn't feel like having the slightly crazier cousin coming in looking for the other one.

"I should probably send him a text, but he'll be fine." Itachi winks at him. More than fine really. "Ecstatic, if I tell him too many details. Which I won't." Shisui was well, Shisui. Alex would figure that out in time. "He's a romantic."

A soft snort escapes Sasuke at the description. "A romantic, huh?" Now where had he heard that before? "Gaara likes to say that I'm a romantic. I think that being a vampire so long has fried his brain."

"Believe me if you had asked Shisui about soulmates, he would have launched into quite an epic sermon." Itachi couldn't help, but laugh at the mental image. "He means well though. Though I suppose we'll have to find out if your vampire friend is right or not."

Sasuke swallows nervously as he strides into the small living room where an old, but deceptively comfortable leather couch sits next to an armchair opposite the windows. "And…exactly how do you plan to find out if he's right or not?"

It was probably beneath him, but Itachi couldn't resist. "Well eventually finding out if you're a cuddler or not seems the simplest way." He smiles at him.

Sitting down on the couch, Sasuke stares incredulously at Itachi. "You want to find out if I cuddle?" Just…how? Why was THAT the first thing he came up with? "…I don't cuddle." Cuddle just seemed so…childish. He hadn't cuddled with anyone since he was seven.

"If you say so." Itachi was sure that Alex did. "I'm sure you just need a bit of practice. Though I obviously wouldn't expect that of you tonight."

Sasuke relaxes fractionally. "So then what are you expecting tonight?" Itachi had said that they were going to talk, but that didn't tell him anything about what the older man wanted to talk about.

"I figured it would be best to talk about what we expect from one another." He smiles. "I don't just mean body modifications, but I'm not adverse to a more casual conversation in order to get to know each other." That might put him at ease.

Honestly, Sasuke wasn't sure how easy either conversation was going to be. He didn't expect much of people anymore, and he certainly didn't know what expectations someone was supposed to have of their soulmate. "Okay. Um…" How could he start that conversation. "I…" Hm…he couldn't really expect Itachi not to kill anybody. That was just something that happened in law enforcement sometimes. There were some people who were just too dangerous to risk not shooting at. "I expect you not to be mean to kids?"

He tilts his head to the side. "Well, I wasn't really planning to be." Itachi kisses his forehead. "I think I can manage that much. This shouldn't be an issue for you, but I expect monogamy."

Sasuke's stare goes flat. "Yeah, not an issue." What else could he say. "Um…I expect you not to be an asshole to me. Not…that I think that you would…" He just didn't want to feel like he expected nothing from Itachi. Or have Itachi feel like he expected nothing from…whatever they were trying to build. He just felt a little lost as to what he was supposed to want out of this.

"I'll try my best only to not be an asshole to you." He nods. "Again that's reasonable enough. Eventually, if this were to really work one of us would have to move."

And…then there was that. Sasuke wasn't sure if he'd really be able to move anywhere, given his
situation. "I think…that's probably something that would need to be visited later. Assuming this works out in the first place." He didn't really have anything to lose by trying with Itachi. Maybe…

"Understandable." It was too new to demand such a thing of him. "I was just addressing the elephant in the room so to speak."

Laughing wryly, Sasuke ruffles up his hair sheepishly. "Right…any other elephants that you want to address?" Might as well get the most awkward stuff out of the way, right? "Do you have any other expectations of me?"

"Well, I'd say not to strangle my cousin, but you're only human." He chuckles. "So I wouldn't hold that one against you entirely."

Sasuke's wry laughter stops for a moment, before ringing out across the room in genuine amusement. "Okay, right, try not to strangle your cousin. I guess that would make things kind of awkward for you at a family reunion."

"Yes and I'd rather not have you have a heart attack when you meet my father." Itachi sighs dramatically. "Though again, I won't hold it against you, if you do."

Taking the expectation that he would have to meet Itachi's family in stride, Sasuke smirks smugly. "I think I can manage not to have a heart attack when I meet Big Itachi."

"You say that now because you haven't met him." Itachi wasn't sure whether to find the prospect more funny or terrifying. "You'll see in time though. He just has a certain animal charisma about him."

"Right." Sasuke chuckles at the thought. "So, you want me to meet the parents, huh?" That wasn't something he ever thought he'd do, but he never thought his soulmate would find him. Or that it would be a man. But apparently Fate was deciding to surprise him today. He just wasn't sure if it was a good surprise or a bad one.

"Eventually." Itachi nod at him. "I wouldn't expect such a thing unless I was certain you were happy with me."

"Unless you were certain I was happy with you…" What a funny thing to say. At least, in Sasuke's eyes. "…You've probably figured out that I have no idea how healthy relationships are supposed to work, what I'm supposed to expect out of one, or even what the implicit expectations are…or if I can even function in one with my…challenges." Namely the roadblock that was his aversion to sex and intimacy.

Itachi nods. There was no point in sugarcoating it, but he wasn't about to make Alex elaborate. That would be too cruel. "Exactly." He suddenly felt tongue tied. "So is there anything you want to ask me?" Itachi decides to keep his mouth shut about how he could handle those roadblocks.

But Sasuke was on the same wavelength and had other ideas. "If…you were in my shoes, how would you try to…deal with my…issues?" He didn't exactly have a guide or a manual to help him out here.

"Well there are scientific ways to that are designed to help people get over various types of trauma and increase their drive, adult entertainment, just experimenting with your partner." He smiles. "There's nothing wrong with your body. It's more a mental block than anything else."

"A mental block…and not a natural disposition?" Sasuke knew that some people were just wired that way from birth, but he didn't really know how to tell the difference when he'd been this way
for as long as he could remember. "How do you tell the difference?"

"Well, I suppose that's a legitimate question." He nods. "The most logical way would be to try it and see if it gets easier for you or not."

To try it and see if it gets easier… Sasuke could see the logic in that. "…Okay." There was a part of Sasuke that screamed at him not to trust anyone but Gaara and Temari. But…there was another part that told him that a soulmate wasn't supposed to be able to hurt their other half. If Itachi was his soulmate, he would be safe… "…Can I see yours?" He runs his hands along Itachi's arms. "The one…that matches mine?"

Itachi nods as he holds out his hand. It was only fair. He had seen Alex's and if things worked out, they'd see a lot more of each other than that. He waits patiently for Alex to look it over.

Rolling up Itachi's right sleeve, Sasuke bares his left arm, eyes flicking back and forth between the two almost identical tattoos. They matched, but they weren't quite carbon copies of each other. Putting his pale arm next to Itachi's sun-kissed skin, it looked almost like the two magnolias were facing each other, reaching out as if they could touch. All of the important details were the same, though. Placement, size, proportions, the colors of the stems and petals, all of those were the same. "They look like they're trying to embrace…"

"Gaara is right." Itachi smiles at him as he caresses his cheek. "You are a romantic. That was a rather poetic description, but accurate."

Sasuke blinks, then rolls his eyes as he tentatively leans into Itachi's touch. "You were reading my mind again, weren't you?"

"No, just the words you said, that they were trying to embrace." He shakes his head and smiles. "When I read your mind it isn't intentional though."

"Right." Sasuke closes his eyes, breathing deeply as he focuses on the sensation of Itachi's fingers against his cheek, his own hand traveling up to run along the back of Itachi's slender fingers. He needed to stop being so suspicious of people. "It's strange…I don't feel like I'm a romantic, though." Maybe his emotions were just too dulled to feel it properly? "You're warm…"

"I think you just don't realize it yet." He smiles and kisses Alex briefly. "Do you like warm?"

Sasuke opens his eyes, surprised, but doesn't move away, he just grips Itachi's hand a fraction harder. "…Yeah, I like it." It had been a long time since he'd felt warm…safe… Gaara made him feel plenty safe, but vampires weren't exactly warm-blooded creatures. And the only other memories of the sensation were tinged with resentment.

"Good. I'm glad." He deepens the kiss ever so slightly. He needed to give the younger man a chance to protest.

Instead of protesting, Sasuke steels himself, breathing in through his nose, then pressing back just slightly. He would not let himself be afraid of Itachi. If he didn't like it, then there was nothing that could really be done about that, but…if this was going to work at all, then he had to at least try.

He was determined, but it was to overcome his block. He might like it, but he was also fighting panic. Itachi sighs at that and runs his fingers through the other man's hair. He had to calm Alex down somehow.

The touch sends a shiver racing up and down Sasuke's spine, not of fear but… "Mmmn." As soon as Itachi's fingers had brushed against the base of his skull, it was as though he'd set off tiny sparklers
there, prickling under his skin.

Well, Itachi had found a spot. "There." He smiles as he brushes it again, pressing gentle fingers against the nape of his soulmate's neck. "See, it's not a lack of desire so much as a latent one."

Sasuke shivers again, leaning his head against Itachi's shoulder as he trembles under the touch. "That...feels..." He wasn't really sure what to call it, it was just..."Good."

Itachi nods approvingly as he does it again and again. Well, it was a start. He wanted to get Alex used to associating touch with more positive feelings.

Tilting his head slightly, Sasuke jumps as Itachi's fingers brush just under his right ear. What the hell? Since when was he so sensitive? "Could you...press a bit harder?" It was so light, like little sparks flying in places that no one ever touched him. No one but Temari, and her touches never elicited this kind of reaction from him.

"Of course." Itachi smiles slyly at that as he applies a bit more pressure. "How's that?" Though he was trying to keep the more deviant direction of his thoughts not...too blatantly obvious.

It was a sensual massage, and Sasuke vaguely registered that somewhere in the back of his mind. And somehow...he didn't mind this. It felt more like the touch was healing him, rather than breaking him down. "Good...feels really good." His voice felt thick, kind of rumbling, almost like a purr or a growl was building in his chest.

Itachi rather liked that purr and captures Alex's lips with his own. All the while continuing the massage.

Relaxed and unfocused, Sasuke kisses back, albeit a little clumsily, trying to mimic Itachi's movements with his own mouth. He could smell a hint of...mint, clove, and bergamot oils? He was pretty sure that Temari had made him smell these once or twice when picking something out for him. She likes spraying him with green apple and sandalwood, not that he'd ever really paid much attention to it.

"You're a natural." Itachi smiles at him between kisses. "See? There's nothing to be scared of."

"Mhm." Sasuke nods, still unfocused and just a little breathless. The peppering of kisses was soft and gentle and he felt...almost like he was something precious. Something soft and fragile that was being handled with utmost care. "...Thank you."

He'd ask what he was being thanked for, but Alex's thoughts were at once a whisper and loud. "You're welcome." So no further words were needed.

Sasuke sags in Itachi's arms, the limbs having come to rest around him between kisses...okay, he'd lost count after ten, he thought. But they'd gotten there at some point. And unlike previous attempts by all the wrong people...he didn't really mind all that much. But it still weighed heavily on him. "...I'm sorry that you have to fix me before I'm any use to you..."

"Alex, that's not really how the soulmate thing is supposed to work." He sighs and kisses his forehead. "It's not a business transaction. Though if you wish to view it in that manner, believe me, it will even out when you meet my father."

"Alex, that's not really how the soulmate thing is supposed to work." He sighs and kisses his forehead. "It's not a business transaction. Though if you wish to view it in that manner, believe me, it will even out when you meet my father."

He snorts with a hint of amusement. "It's funny how you keep thinking that your father is the Big Bad Wolf." Sasuke highly doubted the man was that bad. "And...sorry, I just don't really know how to..." This soulmate thing was vague concepts and romantic stories to him at best. "I guess...I'm just accustomed to needing to be of use to someone for them to want me to stay."
"Oh he's not bad, but he is the big wolf." Itachi couldn't help but laugh. "Though I suppose with that mane, he's more like a lion."

Sasuke snickers quietly. "Sounds like Temari needs to get him in her chair." Oh how he would love to see someone else suffer her attention for once.

That was a funny image. Though Itachi knew how well that would work out. Well more specifically, how well it wouldn't work out. "He'd break her scissors." He winks at his soulmate.

"Then she'd break his wrist." After all, one did not just fuck around with an old Irish vampire's beauty kit and walk away unscathed. "But you don't mind that Temari makes…essentially all of my beauty choices for me, do you?"

"I don't mind." He shakes his head. "I can't argue with the results and if it makes you happy, it doesn't matter."

"Hm…" Sasuke wasn't sure if it made him happy, exactly, but it's not like he hated the results. He just hadn't ever really cared before because…no one's opinion really mattered. But now that he was thinking about it…he could imagine a few things that might be interesting to try. "So…um…about those really sensitive spots. How many of those are there?"

Well, they were definitely making progress. Itachi didn't want to push him too hard, too fast. Still, how could he resist such an opening. "It varies from person to person." He smiles at Alex. "Though most have more than one and not all spots are created equal. Some are more sensitive than others."

Sasuke nods. That seemed logical enough "Okay, what did you have in mind?" Itachi's approach seemed to involve touching him. A lot.

"Oh I have a lot in mind." He just wasn't sure how ready for any of it Alex was. "I suppose that we'll start off slow though."

Right, slow. "Slow is good." Sasuke goes silent for a moment, then shifts over a little on the worn leather of the couch, sitting against Itachi's side. The heat coming off the warm body beside him was soothing, comforting. And…if something happened that he really didn't like, he knew he'd have no trouble extracting himself.

"The back of your head and possibly ears seem sensitive." He smiles at Alex as he pulls the younger man into his lap. "So why don't we start there?"

"Okay." Sasuke blinks as he's settled into Itachi's lap. He'd seen couples do this in the bar, though usually…it was the girl sitting in their boyfriend's lap. The thought irks Sasuke a little, but seeing as Itachi was taller than he was, maybe this was just better mechanics.

"If you prefer I could sit in your lap." He playfully licks Alex's ear. "Whatever you like." It was best to let him control things. He'd probably feel safer that way.

Any words Sasuke could have replied with died on his tongue the moment Itachi licked his ear. "Ah!" Though unexpected, a shiver shoots through him, those same tiny sparks flying along the curve of his ear. He slaps a hand over his mouth, mortified by the tiny sound.

"Your ear is definitely another spot." Itachi smirks at this discovery as he nibbles on it.

Sasuke's shivering quickens, the gentle teeth and tongue tickling his ear in ways that made him wonder just how he hadn't known how sensitive that was. "Itachi…" Sasuke tilts his neck slightly, slowly losing his grip on reality and the plethora of reasons why he should be running for his
He liked the way Alex said his name. "You can keep doing that." Itachi chuckles as he kisses the other man's ear more.

"Mhm." And Sasuke was perfectly happy to let Itachi keep doing THAT. A warm tingle was spreading down from his ear to his shoulder, then towards the tips of his fingers and the ends of his hair. It felt like the temperature was increasing, but he was sure that he'd set the thermostat to twenty degrees. "Tachi…Itachi…Itachi…" He pants lightly as his fingers creep up towards Itachi’s collar, winding into the fabric of his shirt.

He was so sensitive. It was glorious. So Itachi contents himself with teasing the shell of Alex's ear with his lips, tongue, and teeth.

Sasuke felt like he was melting, turning into a puddle of goo. He slumps back against Itachi's shoulder, momentarily detaching those teasing lips from his skin, only for them to brush against his neck and elicit a contented hum from his chest.

"Looks like your neck is another spot." Itachi smiles as he places feather light kisses along it.

Yeah, no kidding. Sasuke vaguely registered that the sensitive places extended up from the base of his neck up through his nape and to his ears. Were sensitive areas usually that big? "…Itachi…?" His voice felt a little slurred, like he was a bit tipsy or something. "Am I strange?"

"You're not strange." Itachi peppers more kisses along that spot. "You're just sensitive. Probably because you haven't allowed yourself to feel this way in a long time."

Hadin't allowed himself to…? Sasuke's eyes shoot open and he sits up straight in Itachi's lap, heart pounding and breath coming in staggered bursts. Images of blinding lights and frightening laughter race through his memories. And a long, ghastly purple tongue that no human should ever have.

"Are you alright?" His thoughts had suddenly become so terrified out of nowhere.

Sasuke tries to take a few deep breaths, his heart stuttering as it tries to slow down. "I…y-yeah, I'm fine." He puts a hand on Itachi's chest, the other on his arm, trying to steady himself. "I just…” … Why did he think this would work? Why even bother trying to do something to make himself happy for once…?

"Whatever it is, your past doesn't have to define you." He kisses Alex's ear again. "It won't, if you don't allow it. I know it's hard, but you're doing so good."

"…Right." Sasuke wasn't so sure about that. Maybe most people could change, but what about when your past really did define you? When it shaped you, gave you the understandings and motivations that you carried for the rest of your life? "But…” While he liked the ear kisses, he felt like his mood had been ruined. "I…need a little time to think about things. On my own." If any of this was going to work, he needed to understand where he stood, and how to get to where Itachi wanted him. Because his head was a mess, and letting Itachi seduce him into that state was not helping with his rational mind.

"Alright." He smiles at him. "I'll give you my number so you can call me when you want to continue our conversation."

"Okay." Sasuke nods, knowing he could do that much after he cleared his head. "…I'm sorry." It wasn't Itachi’s fault that he was so broken and so hard to fix. He was trying…it was just so, so hard.
"You don't have to apologize." He shakes his head. Being soulmates was about more than animal attraction. "I'm not a complete animal, Alex. I can wait for you to be ready."

Sasuke smiles softly, calmed a little by the reassurance and patience in Itachi's voice. "Thank you." Though he wasn't sure if 'being ready' really meant what it was supposed to. How were you supposed to be ready for this sort of thing? Emotions, from what he could tell, didn't really like to work that way. "Then...I'll call you in a couple days?" He figured that Itachi would be busy with work and not want to have a repeat of the last bar incident while still on assignment.

Itachi nods at him. "A couple days sounds good." His fingers fly over Alex's phone, swiped deftly from his pocket as he carefully slides Alex from his lap. Then he rises to his feet and stride casually from the living room and towards the door. He pauses a moment and winks at Alex over his shoulder. "I'll be waiting."

Sasuke laughs softly as the door closes behind his guest. That conversation...had not gone at all the way he'd expected it to when Itachi first walked in the door. But he couldn't find it in himself to regret how it had gone, save for his own ineptitude when it came to anything remotely intimate.

...Fuck...Gaara was going to hound him about this...

"And then...I had a flashback, destroyed the mood, so I asked him for some time to think about all this and he left his number on my phone before heading out." Sasuke felt like a teenager, laying on his bed and talking to a friend about first date or something. Which that most definitely was not. Not at all, and let it never be construed as such. It was just a...friendly visit between soulmates with a very...close getting to know each other portion.

"Well, at least he was understanding about everything," Gaara sighs into the phone. "You found your soulmate, Sasuke. Don't throw that away."

Understanding about everything...was not the way Sasuke would put it, exactly. "He's...kind, gentle, and understanding, yes. But it's not like I've really told him anything." And how could he? Itachi was on the other side of the law. "I can imagine how bad it would get the moment he finds out about me."

"It's a start." Gaara didn't know what he would do with Sasuke. "Be happy you found your love, Sasuke. Don't waste something like that. You can start over. He doesn't ever have to know."

Yeah, maybe if he were normal, but..."Gaara, he's a telepath." If Itachi wanted to dig, and eventually he would, then Sasuke was screwed. "I can never be honest with him. Isn't that supposed to be one of the fundamentals of a good relationship?" The girls at the club complained about it often enough, that their boyfriends weren't being honest enough with them and that the relationship was doomed.

"Well it's not like you're lying, you're just not telling him everything." Oh boy, this wouldn't end well. "Besides there are ways to protect your mind."

"I know, and I am." Sasuke was well aware of the dangers that a telepath posed to him, and he'd been shielding his mind as much as he could. "But he makes it hard to stay focused and feelings are slipping through. I can't control it. And sooner or later, he's going to want to know why I freeze up when he kisses me and why I start shaking in his arms, and..." Fear. Though Sasuke was repressing it as much as he could, he could still feel the fear pounding through his veins. For once, he felt like he might want a future, and now his past and present were getting in the way.
Gaara finds his heart aches for his friend. Still, there was little he could do for him. Other than perhaps hire some witches. "Whatever you need, I will do my best to supply." He smiles into the phone. "You know that."

Yes, Sasuke knew that, but apart from erasing most of his memories, he couldn't think of anything that might help. Nothing except maybe his one last mission. Then, he would hang up his hat for good. No more commissions, no more vendettas. Maybe the occasional spirit walk to give some peace to the ghosts remaining behind…

But before he could do any of that, there was one last person who had to die. "There's…just one last thing I need to do." Something Gaara knew very well. "He's not in the country now, but he'll be coming back soon. I need to time my visit so that I'll catch him before he takes off again."

"I understand." Gaara nods grimly. He knew what was going to happen. "Is there anything I can do to assist you?" The bastard did deserve to die. He had never doubted that much for even a single moment.

"Give me a couple nights off next week?" After all, the last place he'd tracked the snake to was Calgary. …Sasuke did NOT have fond memories of that place. "I'll be as quick as I can, but I might get held up. You know how he likes to draw things out when he has guests."

That made sense. Gaara could give him that much. It'd be easy enough. "Of course. Take all the time you need." He smirks at the phone. "Just make sure to at least text Itachi in the meantime."

"Yeah, I know." After all, if he didn't text Itachi, then his soulmate would get suspicious. But he could pretend to come down with something for a couple of days if Itachi insisted on meeting up while he was away. "Hold down the bar for me?"

"Yes, I can manage that." The vampire nods. "Though hurry back. Everyone will be wondering where their favorite bartender is."

"Right, the fairies will miss me." Sasuke sighs, a huffed laugh falling from his lips. "…I can't believe it's almost over." So many years of his life, finally coming to their climax.

Neither could Gaara. Thank God for this Itachi character or else his friend likely would have willingly marched to an early grave. "Me too." He dares himself to agree.

Sasuke smiles, laying his head on his pillow and closing his eyes. "And Gaara…thanks for your support all these years." With his friend's help, it looked like this was all going to come to an end. Finally. "Now, I'll finally be free."


Sasuke chuckles at the wish. "Then I'll take the luck of the Irish with me." And maybe everything would finally be okay.

Shisui smirks, having waited until the morning to grill his cousin on just why he looked so damn happy. "So, does your good mood have anything to do with a certain asexual bartender that is stubbornly emotionally unavailable?"

"Well he's not entirely asexual, but it was all relatively innocent by our standards." Itachi chuckles. "By his though, well it was quite the breakthrough."

"Oh?" Well, now that was rather interesting. In the limited time Shisui had spent with Alex, he
hadn't gotten a single emotional whiff of arousal, not even once. For a young man in his twenties working a long shift at a nightclub, that was rather impressive. Even more so when someone who had successfully gotten a reaction out of him hadn't gotten any that night when they spoke. "So he's the type that needs some extra stimulation, then?"

He didn't want to spill Alex's secrets, but his cousin was like a bloodhound when it came to this sort of thing. So there was no getting around it. Itachi had to tell him something. "I believe that his childhood was traumatic and that's why he has a harder time being interested in companionship." There. That should do it. Nice and simple.

Yikes, Itachi sure knew how to pick them. Though, to be fair, Shisui had seen his expression that time after sensing his soulmate. "So, I can't imagine that he's just going to be a fling if you're willing to put so much effort into someone with those kinds of challenges." Shisui was trying to put it as tactfully as he could. "But does this mean that you're giving up on finding your soulmate?" Itachi never really had put as much stock into those stories as he had, so Shisui could see that possibility.

Itachi adjusts the earplugs he had placed in his ears for this occasion. "I didn't give up on finding him." That and he places many mental shields in place for the emotional outburst that was sure to follow. "He found me."

Tick…tick…tick… The bulbs lit up in Shisui's brain, and suddenly, all sorts of little pieces were falling into place. Some good, some…not so good. "So…he's the one whose agony you were feeling?" That didn't bode well at all. "Do you realize that you more than doubled the record for transmitting distance between soulmates?"

"I realize that, but he's endured much." That was why he could feel it. "That's why I could feel it so far away."

Apparently so, and to Shisui, that was a potential red flag that needed to be addressed. "So what are you going to do about that?" Having a partner with serious emotional trauma could be trying, even under the best of circumstances. For both their sakes, Shisui wanted to know that Itachi at least had some sort of plan in approaching this.

"I figured the slow approach was best." He wasn't a complete idiot.

"Probably wise." But beyond that, there was a lot that Shisui was concerned about. "Knowing you, I'm guess you brought up the relationship expectations. You're not one for open relationships, though I don't think he'll have any issues with exclusivity. Does he know that you're a psychic?" If he didn't, that could cause a lot of trust problems down the road.

"He knows that I'm a psychic." It would likely be an issue, but now Alex knew what Itachi was. "We'll manage somehow. We're soulmates."

Shisui snickers at Itachi's assertion, reaching out and ruffling Itachi's hair. "Well now, look at who's the romantic one. And here I thought I would have to be into this for the both of us."

He rolls his eyes at his cousin. Only Shisui could get away with messing up with his hair in such a ridiculous fashion. "Well, when you find the one, you know." That was that.

"Yeah." And Shisui was confident that it wouldn't be long until he found his. "So, is that who you got that necklace for?" He'd seen it in one of Itachi's drawers this morning when he'd opened the wrong one while looking for his underwear. "Looked kind of pricey to just be a souvenir."
Those words stop Itachi right in his tracks. The necklace was the reason why he had bumped into Alex at all. It was also something that was very likely to blow up in his face. "No, that's for Sasuke." He sighs. "I don't want to jail him, but when we do...I want him to know that he still has people who care about him." It was the least they could do.

The knowledge sobers Shisui, casting the smile from his face. "I see…” And that was assuming that they could keep the amended clauses to the abolition of the death penalty from ending his life prematurely. Though largely done away with, there were still clauses included that accounted for cases where there were more counts of murder than someone could live to serve sentences for. "…Speaking of, I got us our flights to Calgary, and plotted us a course straight to Orochimaru. We'll be able to pay him a visit in a few days."

"Good." The sooner they got this over with, the better. "I can't believe we're saving that bastard."

Shisui smiles grimly. "Well, then maybe we'll get some proof to indict him with." After all, something had to make Sasuke this angry, and Shisui was worried about what exactly they were going to find.
Sasuke wasn't entirely sure what possessed him to make the call after only two days, especially with his trip to Calgary looming. But he still had forty-eight hours before leaving and everything he needed was packed and ready to go. The preparations were the only reason that he hadn't had much time to think about calling Itachi. They gave him time to think about things without letting Itachi's pretty face get in the way.

It was hard, but maybe…maybe they really could make this work. Sure, Sasuke was damaged, but Itachi seemed more than willing to help him try to start getting over that. And Itachi was so kind…so gentle…if anyone could help…then maybe it was him. Sasuke had tossed away the stories of soulmates a long time ago, but maybe it was time to revisit that decision.

So, on his second day off that week, he picks up his phone and dials the brand new number that he'd been holding off on using. It was late enough in the day that it should be acceptable for Itachi to take his call. But Sasuke didn't know what sort of schedule the detective was running on, so maybe not…Did detectives run on a nine to five schedule at all?

He holds his breath in as the device rings once, then twice. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. What if Itachi was busy? What if he'd decided that this was too much trouble? What if-

Itachi had just been putting away the dishes, when he hears the phone ring. So like any sensible person, he answers it. "Hello?" He smiles into the phone.

At hearing Itachi's voice, Sasuke's brain stutters a little. Crap! What was he supposed to say!? "Ah…hi Itachi." Great, not the most intelligent thing he's ever said. "It's…it's me, Alex."

"Hey." No wonder why he hadn't recognized the number. Alex had never called him before. "I imagine that you're more used to people asking for your number than calling them."

Sasuke snorts with amusement, his nerves calming thanks to the joke. "Yeah, something like that. I only ever really call Gaara, and even then I don't need to call often, he usually just shows up unannounced."

"That does sound like a vampire." Itachi chuckles at that. "Especially the older ones."

"He's also Irish, so there's usually alcohol involved." Sasuke was certain that he wouldn't have his current tolerance for alcohol if it wasn't for Gaara's drinking habits.

That did make sense. Though he probably shouldn't stereotype. "Most likely." Itachi nods into the phone. "So to what do I owe this pleasure?"

Sasuke bites his lip, then takes a silent breath. "I…thought about what you said the other day." And he couldn't believe he was doing this. Or…the old him couldn't. "Do you…want to come
"I'd love to." This was such progress. "When would be a good time?" He hadn't expected Alex to call him this early on. Let alone to invite him back to his place.

"Whenever you're free. I've got the night off." Of course, Sasuke wasn't about to tell him why that was, but he was glad that telepathy didn't work over the phone. "If you haven't eaten, I can order something." Bartending and mixing drinks was one thing, but cooking wasn't something that Sasuke had ever really picked up. He'd never had a need for it.

"That's alright. I already ate." Besides, he was more interested in Alex anyway. "I'll swing by then."

"Great." Sasuke's hand shakes slightly whether in panic or anticipation he wasn't sure, but he stills it. "I'm looking forward to it." He pauses a moment, then nods to himself. "There's a lot of things I want to ask you about…and try."

Hmm. That sounded exceptionally promising, but Itachi knew it would be foolish to get his hopes up. "Alright. I should be there in about twenty minutes." Depending on how bad traffic was. "A little more or a little less." That and how long it took him to find something decent to wear.

"Great." Sasuke's heart lightens and he smiles. "I'll see you in a little while, then." He holds the call a few seconds longer, then chuckles softly and hangs up.

Shisui glances into the kitchen curiously to see Itachi staring at his phone. "So, got a hot date tonight?"

"You could say that." He shakes his head. "Though it's hardly conventional."

"Oh?" Shisui raises an eyebrow. "Are you taking Alex out or going to his place again?"

He didn't really see how that made a difference. "I'm going to his place again." It was what the other man was clearly more comfortable doing.

"Hm…so you'll need something nice but comfortable, since there's probably going to be a lot of touching involved." Shisui wanted to say snuggling, he really did, but Itachi would kill him if he said it out loud.

"Given his trauma, I wouldn't assume that there will be much touching involved." Itachi knew enough not to get his hopes up about that sort of thing with Alex.

Shisui rolls his eyes. "I don't mean jumping him, Itachi, I mean…" Fine, he was going to have to say it. "Snuggling. If he's inviting you to his house again, he probably wants to ease into a physical relationship, and that means snuggling."

Itachi rolls his eyes. "I think I should let him know you called it snuggling." It might be amusing to watch Alex smack Shisui around.

"So that's a yes on the snuggling." Shisui grins widely. "I'd go with some jeans, your dark blue cotton shirt, and your leather jacket is pretty comfy too."

"Good call." Leather did seem like it would be something Alex was into.

"Alright, now go and snuggle with your little magnolia." Shisui wink. "I'm sure that he'll warm
right up to you as long as you're charming." He had a sense that Itachi would be able to put Alex at ease and make him comfortable with expressing himself as a sexual person. After all, the bartender apparently wasn't asexual after all.

"You're a little too invested in my love life." Itachi chuckles, but changes and heads off all the same. "I'll deal with Shisui's obsession later." After all, he did tell Alex that he'd be there in twenty minutes and being late would just ruin the tone for the rest of the evening. Itachi Uchiha was many things, but a Kakashi wasn't one of them.

It was a nerve-wracking twenty minutes for Sasuke, who was pacing in his living room, his brain throwing a million reasons at him why this was a very bad idea. But he'd done everything he could. His contacts were in, the streaks were bright, and the eyeliner changed the shape of his eyes. He might not have Temari's talents, but he could replicate her work well enough for tonight.

Then the doorbell rings and his head snaps up, eyes darting to the door. He approaches it cautiously, calming his nerves with a few deeps breaths and opens it to smoky black eyes. "Hey."

"Hey." Itachi smiles at him. "You look amazing." He always did though. So that was hardly a surprise.

"Thanks." Sasuke's eye's dart downward, taking in Itachi's clothes. "You too." He could see why the fairy took an interest in him. And the thought burns a little inside. "Come in." He holds the door open, taking a step back to give Itachi enough room to enter.

Itachi nods and quickly saunters inside. Well, Step One was complete. He had made it inside Alex's house without an incident. Now, onto Step Two. "So what did you have in mind?" He smiles at Alex in what he hopes was a disarming way.

Sasuke blinks, then glances over to the living room. "I thought we could talk some more…get to know each other better." At least a little. "Maybe some…exploration?"

That's about what he expected. "That sounds perfect to me." Itachi smiles and sits on the couch, silently inviting Sasuke to join him.

There was plenty of room on the couch but...instead of trying to maintain a 'comfortable' distance, Sasuke lopes across the room, sliding back into his previous place on Itachi's lap and tucking his head against Itachi's chin. Now...to find something to talk about. "So...what's your family like?"

"My family is large and most are gifted in some fashion or another." Itachi smile as he runs he caresses the other man's cheek. "I'm lucky that way."

Oh." So a whole family of psychics, then? That could prove to be a bit difficult to deal with, but Sasuke would cross that bridge when the time came. "So...do you live with your family? Just with your cousin? Or do you live alone back in..." Sasuke frowns. "You're American...but you haven't told me where you're from."

"My family lives in New York." He smiles at him. "Of course, I travel occasionally." Suddenly, he realizes why Alex was becoming increasingly more skittish. "Relax. It's just Shisui and I that live together and my family wouldn't invade someone's privacy like that."

"Okay." New York, huh? Sasuke had been there a couple of times. "Do most of them live close by?"
Oh boy. Here was where things might get tricky. "Yes, we tend to be fairly tightly knit." That was putting it mildly. "Though it's not as though they'll barge in without knocking."

"Hm..." Sasuke tilts his head, trying to imagine it but...failing. "That must be...nice to have family so close." It was nice that Itachi was so honest. "What was school like? You were probably top of your class, right?" Itachi stuck him as the type to excel. "What did you major in at university?"

"Yes, I was." He chuckles and shakes his head in amusement as he remembers Madara's unique style of encouragement when it came to his studies. "My father would have had a hard time accepting anything less of me. I majored in psychology and neuroscience."

Why did that not surprise Sasuke as much as it should have. "Of course. So you're not only psychic, but you know how to use science to mind-fuck people, too."

"I believe in utilizing my gifts to the best of my abilities." He kisses Alex's forehead and tries not to laugh at his annoyance. "Whether they're solely based in magic, science, or some combination. Besides, I can 'mind-fuck' people in enjoyable ways as well."

Sasuke's cheeks heat ever so slightly, but he casts a challenging look at Itachi. "How so?"

"Well there are many ways that I could go about such a thing and different degrees." He smiles. "Of course, the more receptive someone is to the idea, the easier it is to do."

"I see." That could be...something to explore once he got a bit more comfortable with Itachi. "So what was your childhood like? Your cousin seems like he's the adventurous type, so I imagine that you got dragged on a lot of 'outing'."

Far more than he would ever care to admit. Alex was right about that much. Shisui was adventurous. "Well, it is never easy to stand in the shadows of greatness, but I had an ideal childhood otherwise." He smiles. "Though it is a damn near miracle that Shisui's antics didn't get us both killed before adulthood."

Sasuke laughs lightly, imagining a teenage Itachi and the indignant look on his face. "That must have been nice. Minus all the near-death experiences, though."

"It was." He smirks at Alex. "You would have been quite exasperated with the both of us though."

"Probably." Though Sasuke had his fair share of dangerous adventures. None that he could share with Itachi, though. Nevertheless, he smiles against Itachi's neck. "Your turn." After all, while he couldn't tell Itachi much, he could at least help the man get some sense of who he was.

"How long have you known Gaara?" It seemed like a safe topic for him to broach. "The two of you do seem close."

"Since I was seventeen." Seven years now, and it felt like so much longer. Sasuke smiles wryly. "He basically took me in seven years back and I haven't been able to get rid of him."

"I doubt you really want to." He smiles at him.

"Yeah, I guess not." Not that Sasuke thought getting rid of an old Irish vampire would be easy, but... "Temari can be a pain at times, but I know she cares."

He nods at that. Itachi couldn't help but feel a little tongue tied. Maybe Alex would have another question. "Yes, that's the impression that I'm getting." He smiles and places a soft kiss to Alex's ear.
Sasuke shivers, tilting his head slightly as the lobe of his ear slides between Itachi's lips. "Y-yeah…” Hm, maybe letting Temari pierce his ears was a better idea than he thought. If Itachi had something to tug on… "S-so, anything else?"

"Well I want to ask plenty, but I never know what is safe." He kisses his ear again. "I don't want to trigger any unpleasantness."

And there was the issue that Sasuke knew was going to be a serious roadblock. "Well…honestly, there's not much that's really comfortable to talk about, but...if it's really bad, then I just don't talk about it at all."

He nods and kisses him. "Alright." Itachi decides it was best to just distract Alex from those unpleasant topics for the time being.

Well, that sure wasn't a question, but Sasuke was fine with that. "Sneaky." He kisses back, looping his arms around Itachi's neck as he leans back, resting against the arm of couch.

Yes, he could be sneaky sometimes. It was just something that came with the territory though. He did work for the CIA. He smiles and continues kissing him. "I'll admit to that freely." Kissing Alex was wonderful.

Sasuke rolls his eyes as he slides down to rest the back of his head against Itachi's arm, his body laid out against the couch as he pulls Itachi down to meet him. "Well at least you're honest." It was a relief, and it promised good things. "Will you...show me a little more about those spots you mentioned a couple days ago."

"Yes, I did." He smiles at him slyly. "I think your neck will likely be one. Would you care to experiment?"

Sasuke grimaces slightly at the word experiment, but otherwise gives no protest. "Alright. What did you have in mind?" It wasn't as though he was helpless. And this was Itachi. If Sasuke could trust anyone to be gentle with him…it should be Itachi.

"Necking." He smiles and places a few feather light kisses along Alex's collarbone to test the waters.

Sasuke arches his neck, his eyes sliding halfway shut as Itachi lavishes his neck with attention. "That's nice." Each touch made his skin tingle and he winds his fingers into Itachi's hair, tugging lightly on the soft strands, guiding Itachi back up his neck a few inches.

He smirks and increases the pressure, deciding to suck lightly on the sensitive skin underneath him.

A gasp escapes Sasuke's lips as Itachi sucks on the skin just below his jaw. And just like the last time, it made his body feel kind of hot. Not unbearably so, but the heat of Itachi's breath intensified the sensation drastically.

Itachi smiles and wraps his other hand around the back of Alex's neck to pull him even closer. This time lightly grazing with his teeth as he continues sucking and peppering the beautiful canvas underneath him in heated kisses.

"Ah!" Sasuke's breath starts coming out in small panting gasps and his fingers tighten in Itachi's hair. He was hot...so, so hot. His other hand travels down, past the leather of Itachi's jacket and to the soft cotton shirt underneath, gripping it tightly.
"We can do whatever you want." Itachi smiles at him encouragingly, shifting Alex from his lap so that he could rest above the younger man.

Sasuke gazes blearily at Itachi, disappointed somewhat by the lack of attention. But through the haze, a few words stuck out in his mind. "I feel so hot." If he could just cool down, maybe he'd have better ideas. "M-my shirt."

"We can fix that easily enough." He chuckles as he slowly slides Alex's shirt off. "You're beautiful." it was no wonder why everyone in that bar panted after him, Itachi thinks as he playfully flicks his tongue against a nipple.

Despite the cool air against his skin, Sasuke shudders with growing heat as his nipples tighten and perk up. "Itachi!" It was unbearable, how did people stand acts that created this much heat? This much pressure? The muscles in his stomach felt like they were tightening, coiling up like a python.

That either meant he really liked it or really hated it. So Itachi smiles as he places kisses along his chest before lapping at that spot. "How does it feel?" He could always stop if it truly made him uncomfortable, but those sounded more like cries of passion than protest.

Sasuke drops his head to the side, watching Itachi dazedly. "It feels…" It felt like there was a tiny warm ball inside of him being pressed and squeezed and twisted. If he didn't know better, he'd say he was aroused. But he wanted it bigger. He wanted those fireworks that couples at the bar always talked about. "Kiss me?"

Itachi didn't have a problem doing exactly that. So he captures Alex's lips in his own, completely devouring and seducing the other man's mouth slowly and thoroughly.

Drunk on the heat and passion of Itachi's kisses, Sasuke kisses back heatedly, wrapping his arms back around Itachi's neck and pulling his soulmate down on top of him, reassured by the weight of Itachi's body there. The heat was becoming an itch, and Sasuke wanted it scratched, bad.

The psychic smiles as he glides his tongue along Alex's as his hands begin to roam over his wonderfully sculpted chest. Perfection. He was tempted to go further and debating on it. Alex certainly felt receptive in every sense of the word, but he didn't want him to bolt, if he pushed too hard, too soon.

Sasuke arches into Itachi's strong, slender hands. He presses his tongue back and curling it experimentally around Itachi's as his own hands slip into Itachi's shirt, feeling the smooth skin stretch over hard muscles. Itachi's body felt so warm, so strong, so real in ways nothing else ever had. It was as though he was conscious of Itachi on an almost spiritual level.

The words were right on the tip of his tongue, but Itachi knew it was a bad idea to say them this early. "You're perfect." It was too early for an 'I Love You.' So that would have to do, he muses as he allows his hand to drift ever lower down Alex's stomach, wondering if he would stop him.

Amber eyes open wide, startled by the words as shame wells up inside of him. "…No…I'm not." Sasuke was so far from perfect. Itachi deserved perfect, deserved more…more than he had to offer.

"You are to me and really seeing as our tattoos match, I believe my opinion is the only one that really counts other than your own." Itachi hushes him with another kiss. "Well that and perhaps the vampires you're so fond of."

Sasuke's heart was broken and swollen with emotion at the same time. He was so…damaged, and yet, Itachi accepted that he was and wasn't going to pry. How was it that he was able to look past
such obstinacy and his cold, unpleasant demeanor and see anything of value still left in him? It was a mystery…but one that Sasuke was fine with leaving unsolved. "You're…amazing, Itachi."

So was Alex. He just didn't know it yet. So Itachi smiles and kisses him. "I'm not the only one." It was easiest to express affection physically. "That's why we matched." Words might overload Alex.

"Yeah…maybe." Sasuke sighs into the kiss, returning it with equal fervor. He could feel the heat pooling, slowly stirring to life. Maybe Itachi was right. Maybe he just needed some help to get worked up. "Wish they'd sent you to me sooner." A lot sooner, then maybe he'd be a better match for Itachi.

"Well better late than never." He smiles at Alex as if all would be well. "Besides, you learned how to be a hell of a bartender in the meantime."

Sasuke chuckles. "Yeah, there is that." If nothing else, employment wouldn't be an issue for him. It was a rare city that didn't have bars with staff shortages. "Though I should probably get my high school completion status registered at some point. I work at Onyx because Gaara is my friend, but…some people are hard to please."

That surprised him, though it didn't at the same time. "Well, I'm sure you could do that easily enough." He smiles. "Or more if you wanted. Though I am reluctant to throw you to the hungry coeds."

A grimace crosses Sasuke's face at the thought of being devoured by the crazy college girls. "Yeah…I don't think so. I wouldn't even know what to study if I went." He sits himself up, leaning close to Itachi and closing his eyes. "Gaara just drilled eight years worth of school into me for three years after he found me."

"That would be up to you but there are also online or men only colleges." The latter was a rarity to be sure, but they did exist. At least Itachi thought they still did.

Sasuke's blood runs a little cold. "…Men can be very…unpleasant at times. So even if I had something I liked enough to study, I wouldn't try going to one of those." That and the living costs of being a student aside, Sasuke was pretty sure that they'd want a more substantial course history than 'a vampire taught me everything'.

"Right." He smiles and kisses him. "Don't look so frightened. There's nothing that says you absolutely have to go to university or college."

"I know." And with Sasuke's background, the idea was shaky at best. "My life is complicated enough anyway."

"I understand." Itachi wraps his arms around him tightly. "You don't have to prove anything to me."

He was wrong, but Sasuke didn't feel like pointing that out. "Maybe." But at the end of the day, functioning as a regular member of society was going to be very hard, and he wasn't really sure that he could do it. So yes. He had everything to prove if it was for Itachi's sake. "…Do you think your family would approve of me?" Assuming that they never found out about his past, anyway.

"I imagine so." He smiles at Alex. "If not, my mother is very handy with a frying pan. She'll beat some sense into them."

"Is that so?" That brought a rather vivid image to mind, one that Sasuke could wholly approve of. "I think I like your mother already. And I don't usually say that about parents."
"She's probably the only woman that could have ever handled my father." Itachi chuckles at the thought.

Sasuke smiles sadly. "It sounds like you love them very much."

"I do though my father drives me half mad sometimes." There was no getting around that. "He's like a lion that just transformed into a person one day."

"I see. That must be…intense." Sasuke couldn't imagine having a parent like that. "…Are lions very protective of their cubs?"

"Indeed." He laughs softly. "They're the only male cat that are other than some housecats, but don't worry. My mother will save you with her frying pan, in the worst case scenario."

"I'm not worried." There was nothing that Itachi's father could do to him that would scare Sasuke at this point. "I just think that it must have been nice. Maybe a bit smothering, the way you talk about him, but nice."

Poor Alex. It was unlikely he ever had a father figure. "Mostly nice, yes." Itachi sighs and hugs him. "You'll meet them soon enough."

"If you have your way, I will." Sasuke smirks slightly, covering up his hurt. "But at least we'll only have to go through this routine once. Gaara doesn't really do the whole father protecting his daughter's chastity thing."

"I would hope not." Itachi laughs at that. "Seeing as I don't think you have the right parts to qualify as a daughter."

Sasuke rolls his eyes. "Yes, I think it's rather obvious that I've got the wrong parts. Though if you want a mom with a frying pan, I think Temari is close enough. She can hit you with her makeup box."

"I think the makeup box would be heavier than the frying pan actually." It was a most amusing image too.

"Probably, considering how much she shoves into it," Sasuke didn't fancy his own chances against that box either. That was one vampire utterly obsessed with hair and makeup. Mostly through the use of Sasuke as her doll. "…Is that what you want? A family?"

"Are you asking if I want children?" Itachi tilts his head at the question.

"Well, you mentioned moving in together at some point, and you seem to really like your family. I just assumed that kind of thing was important to you." Not that Sasuke was particularly for or against it, but it would be good to know where Itachi stood. "You told me some of your expectations. What about your hopes?"

Itachi was pretty sure he knew what this was. "Children are not a deal-breaker, if that isn't something you're interested in." Which it probably wasn't, given Alex's background.

Sasuke exhales a soft sigh of relief. It wasn't that he didn't like children. Not at all, he was quite protective of them, at the very least. He just…didn't know if he could ever trust himself to be wholly responsible for a tiny life. Not now, and not soon, at least. "I'm not going to say never, but I'm not going to say soon, either."

"That's fine with me." He smiles at him. "We're not on a biological clock as much as women are."
That was true, and Sasuke was still quite young. Probably too young to be considering such a serious topic anyway. "Yeah, we have time." They had time, just as long as Sasuke finished his last mission and didn't get caught. "So, what else are you hoping for that you haven't told me about?"

That was such a loaded question. They had only just met a short time ago. It wasn't as if Itachi could have told him everything, even if he wanted to. "What would you like to know?" Itachi smiles at him. "I'm afraid I'm at a loss for what you want me to say."

Great, so Itachi wanted him to broach the topics instead. "Well, I know that there's a lot of things that couples hope for. Kids, marriage, formal or informal, growing old together, maybe moving to another country for their retirement or using their golden years to travel the world, some want one partner to stay at home and keep house." That last possibility honestly horrified him. "So... what is it that you wanted in your life?" Because Sasuke suspected that Itachi was the type to choose one person and not stray, even without the extra dimension that being soulmates added.

"I always figured I'd continue at my job." Itachi shrugs, feeling a bit uncomfortable at having to lay out his whole life plan that he hadn't even fully formed yet. "That my husband or wife would continue at theirs or stay home, if that's what they wanted and perhaps a couple of kids." He sounded so generic. "You don't strike me as the stay at home type though."

Sasuke snorts at the thought. "You'd have to tie me to a chair to get me to stay anywhere. And even that probably wouldn't do it." Hm... so Itachi hadn't really thought about it much, then. That could be fine. They could figure out the rest of the details as they went. The marriage and kids was pretty standard. "I guess I'm just trying to figure out what you're hoping for... figure out my own limits, and then maybe find a balance that will work for us both." That was the only way this was going to work. They would both have to bend, or one of them was going to break.

That was probably logical, but it felt so... clinical. "If there is something you don't like, you can tell me, and we'll work it out." It would be impossible to plan everything in advance. "I'm sorry. I don't really have a list."

"Well, I don't like intimacy, but apparently I'm willing to bend on that for... certain people." Sasuke casts Itachi a teasing look. "The thought of a relationship scares the hell out of me, but apparently I'm considering one anyway. So I'm still trying to figure out what my limits really are."

He smiles and kisses him. "That's alright." It seemed the best course of action at the moment. "We'll figure them out together."

"Together..." Sasuke smiles into the kiss, sighing softly. "That sounded good. He just hoped that it didn't go up in flames like everything else he touched."
Recently returned to his small estate in North Calgary, Orochimaru watches as his assistant comes into his office. Kabuto must have just finished up the latest batch of reports. Their experiments were numerous and varied as were their test subjects. Which was why it was important to keep track of everything. Not only for the sake of science, but also for the sake of profit.

"The tests on Selkie regeneration are going well. The base numbers were insufficient for practical application, but with the increased dosage, I believe that we'll see the creatures progress into a more efficient state." Kabuto flips through his copious notes, skipping over sections where the change was too negligible to yet be of any use. "The fairy wing dissections are proceeding on schedule and we should have the answer as to whether we can remove the glands and use artificial means to produce the dust by tomorrow. And the tests on Salamanders to determine whether they can be used as mass heating sources are showing promising results. All we have to do is keep them in impact and heatproof containers, and they work as portable furnaces."

"The wolves have been…uncooperative, but my latest cocktail should put an end to their willfulness." Though keeping track of the progression of so many experiments was taxing, Kabuto enjoyed the knowledge that it brought to their field. Even if some of their subjects were…resistant to being there at first. They all calmed down eventually, it was just about finding proper ways to control their behavior. "Regrettably, the Light Room remains empty." Shadow-walkers were rare enough, but finding a second one after the first one was stolen from them was proving very difficult. And Kabuto had scoured the entire black market a dozen times looking for a captive one that they could purchase. A shame, the last one had been so promising.

"Well, I suppose that's about the best we can hope for." It was such a shame Sasuke was gone. "Speaking of regrettable, have we made any progress with vampires?" Rasa was being rather generous with his donations. "Rasa wants the cure to his 'condition' for him and his family and given how deep his pockets are, I'm inclined to give it to him."

"Yes…let's see." Kabuto flips through the virtual charts, coming to the vampire file. "We're in the process of acquiring twenty specimens for experimentation, as well as substances from across the world, reputed to be effective as weapons against vampires." After all, many antidotes came from the same plant as the poison they counteracted, and snake venom could be used to counteract other venom. "We will begin the experiments as soon as the materials have arrived, which should be in approximately ten days."

Orochimaru nods. Ten days was far more time than he wanted, but understandable given the situation. "Good." They would begin experimentation as soon as everything and everyone arrived.

"Also, we have received an inquiry from…the CIA." Though what exactly they wanted from his boss, Kabuto wasn't sure. "Apparently, they have two agents who will be visiting Calgary shortly..."
and would like to speak with you. They inform me that it is a matter of utmost importance, and that your life may be in danger."

Damn it. That couldn't be good. They must have connected him to Danzo somehow. "Very well." He nods at his partner in crime. "I shall speak to them."

"Yes, Sir." When Kabuto had received the message, it had seemed odd. It was as if the CIA were concerned for his boss' welfare. There was no indication that their experiments had been found out. He couldn't help but wonder just what was going on. "I will inform you when they arrive." He bows over his holo-tablet before promptly sweeping himself from the room.

He nods at that as he goes back to looking over the reports. Danzo must have been more faulty with his security than usual. Orochimaru wouldn't make the same mistake.

Feeling a little ill at the prospect of speaking to the man who had allegedly bought their little cousin as some sort of slave, Shisui makes their presence known at the door to the large house. Something felt very...wrong about this place. It was outside of the city proper, in one of the suburbs that reach out around the core of the city. There was a decent amount of land, but only two buildings on it. The main house, and what might pass for an old shed. The house itself was ancient, probably built during the middle of the twenty-first century. But that wasn't what was putting Shisui off.

No, what was putting him off was the highly dampened emotional energy coming from this place. Dozens of voices screamed out to him, their emotions indistinct, but impossible to ignore. He gritted his teeth, but focused on the task ahead for now. They would get to nail Orochimaru for this once they'd caught Sasuke.

"I feel it too." Itachi sighs as he looks at his cousin. "He's next. I promise you that." He stands in front of the door with his cousin. Sometimes, he hated his job. This was one of those times.

Shisui sets his face into an emotionless mask as the door opens, revealing a man about their age with spiky grey hair pulled back into a ponytail. "Can I help you?"

Shisui holds up his badge. "Special Agent Shisui Uchiha, CIA. This is my partner, Itachi. We're here to speak with Orochimaru Sannin."

The man blinks, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly, before he opens the door fully. "I see. Yes, we've been expecting you." He turns his back to them, motioning for them to enter. "My name is Kabuto Yakushi, I serve as Dr. Sannin's personal assistant."

He'd likely also serve his jail time in the cell adjourning Orochimaru's. Still, Itachi knew better than to actually say that. So he forces himself to be quiet as he follows the man. For now.

"Ah." Orochimaru slithers out of a room and greets them, a few moments later. "It's so good to see you. You must be tired after your long journey."

Admittedly, flying between Toronto and Calgary hadn't exactly been a short jaunt, but Shisui had experienced much worse. "We are more than capable of functioning in the capacity we've been sent to fulfill." Which, at this rate, was going to include the arrest of one very prominent doctor. "But there's little time for pleasantries, Doctor. The two of us have come to inform you that, regrettably, your life is in danger from the serial killer that the two of us have been tracking. He recently committed another in a series of unsolved murders, this time in Chicago. And his most
recent victim was Danzo Shimura, as you no doubt heard in the news." He had to play his cards right here, or he'd make Orochimaru skittish.

He forces himself to sound scared. "Yes, I saw the news." Orochimaru shakes his head and shivers. "He was brutally murdered. I can't believe how savage people can be to one another."

"Indeed. And we have reason to believe you are the killer's next target." Not without good reason, though. And now that Shisui had met the man, he could understand why anyone would be traumatized in this place. "We believe that his arrival is imminent, so we would like to set up here and capture him as he begins his attempt. Otherwise, he has proved elusive, at best. His abilities have made this case a top priority for the agency."

Itachi nods at that. He didn't like it, but they had a job to do. Besides, maybe while here he could find a way to help at least some of the prisoners. "Indeed." He smiles at Orochimaru. "Perhaps you or Kabuto can help us to protect the both of you." The very idea left a sour taste in his mouth, but there it was.

Kabuto looks to his boss for direction, then to the agents. "Agent Uchiha, are you certain that the killer is after Doctor Sannin? He is a medical researcher, a far cry from a businessman or politician."

"Fairly certain, yes." And Shisui liked this less and less by the minute. "If it turns out to be a false alarm, then all the better for the two of you. If it turns out not to be, then it's best to be prepared, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is sound logic." Orochimaru nods. "Well, we shall assist you in whatever way we can." Sasuke was coming for them then. There could be no other explanation.

"Good." Shisui resists the urge to sigh with relief. "Then I must ask you if you know a man by the name of Sasuke. We believe that he is a killer who holds a grudge against those he sees as doing wrong, whether they are or not." Best not to tip his hand entirely, but Shisui wanted to provide an opportunity for Itachi to get a proper scan of this guy. "His favorite targets seem to consist of older men, some of whom are rather influential in their fields. Can you think of any reason why he might be targeting you, specifically?"

"He was a...participant in our trials." Orochimaru decides to choose his words carefully. "We do prefer to have long-term studies and the best way to do that is with children. He was with us for many years." The scientist sighs, feigning depression. "Unfortunately, his magical gifts came at a cost. Insanity. He left years ago and I haven't heard from him since."

Insanity and sociopathic tendencies, perhaps, but the man was still an Uchiha, and a genius to boot. Shisui doubted that this man was even a shred as innocent as he pretended to be. "I see, then we will stay and prepare immediately to apprehend him. As a substantial threat to society, he'll have to be locked away securely." And the more he said it, the less he believed it. "Itachi." He glances at his cousin. "Why don't you examine the house for ways that Sasuke could make his way in through while I go over the rest of the details with Dr. Sannin." This was Itachi's chance to scope the place out and find out just what was going on here, and how it all related to Sasuke.

Itachi was eager to get away from Orochimaru and even more eager to save his prisoners. So he just nods as he makes his way away from the unlikely pair. Which was one small mercy. Unfortunately, he could still hear the frantic pleas for salvation or sweet death from likely hundreds of 'patients.'

Of course, none of the sensations came from within the house itself. The muted, distant feel of the
voices came from below, under the floor, under the foundations on which the house was built. And
then, there were the echoing voices of the past, reaching out for someone to listen, someone who
might hear their pain and help them.

"Of course." They weren't anywhere that someone would find them by happenstance. "They're
underneath the building." He frowns at the thought. "He really is such a snake."

But while the echoes of the current patients were muted, the echoes of the past refused to be
silenced in the presence of a psychic capable of hearing them.

"Let go of me!" A young, frantic voice cries out in pain, screams tearing from an invisible throat
belonging to a now imaginary child.

The cries make Itachi wince. They would have been bad enough on their own, but even more so
when he knew they were from the past. It had to be Sasuke. A blood tie might explain why the
memory was jumping out at him.

"You're lying!" Sasuke's voice rings out in defiance at first, weakening as it it was repeated over
and over again. "You're lying...you're lying...you're...lying..." Only a whisper of the once strong
voice remained.

Itachi couldn't blame Sasuke for slaughtering him. Itachi was only witnessing a second or even
third hand trauma, but he wanted Orochimaru dead.

An older, tired voice breaks through the haze of the younger Sasuke's memories. "...Go away
Kimimaro."

"Uchiha, listen to me." The voice of a second boy appear, the semi-broken voice of a boy in his
teens. "We need you. You're the only one who can avenge us."

Sasuke voice has barely a shadow of its former strength. "You're dead...leave me alone."

"No, you're the only one who listens to us."

"You're dead! I don't want to listen anymore!" A cry of pain and the sound of a head hitting the
wall resounds in the empty halls. "Stay away!"

"Sasuke..."

"It's becoming clear what happened." Itachi sighs and shakes his head. "It was no wonder he
became insane." Anyone would have, but that wouldn't help him much in the court of law.

Slowly, the voices fade away, but not before imparting one last image. An image of a seventeen
year-old boy with spiky hair, pale skin, and lifeless black eyes tinged with a hint of ruby red.

He'd never felt so helpless in his entire life. Itachi briefly contemplates just checking himself into a
mental health institution.

"Agent?" Kabuto pokes his head around the corner, looking for Itachi. "Ah, there you are. Have
you found anything that we should be concerned about in terms of security?" He didn't like having
CIA in the mansion, especially not ones with the last name Uchiha. They could start getting nosy.
"Your security is exceptional." Unfortunately. "Is there anything further you wish to discuss?"

Oh, to ask or not to ask, that was the question. Kabuto could hardly contain his curiosity. "I have heard that in the supernatural community, the Uchiha are rather famous for their psychic abilities. Would this be true?"

"I should have been more specific." Itachi tries his best not to glare at the other man. "Anything relevant to the case."

Kabuto was rather put out. "It may not be relevant to the case, but it would be a great help in our research." Hm…how to prod further… "Though it may be, after all, we did suspect for a time that Sasuke was either going mad or speaking to ghosts. But we never found evidence of spirits, and we concluded that he was simply going mad. Is that common in your family? If it is, then with enough research, we might find a cure for it."

"If Sasuke was going mad, I doubt it was because of spirits." Itachi gives him a glare so cold that it could turn the surface of the sun into solid ice. "More than likely, that was related to the human company he was forced to endure and fortunately, our job does not require us to disclose our family's private medical history to strangers."

"I…see. I suppose that you are entitled to believe whatever you choose to." Well, that was disappointing, and rather aggravating, but Kabuto could always try again later. Perhaps Orochimaru was having more luck with the other agent. "In that case, no, there is nothing of relevance that I can think of. Do you have any questions yourself regarding our security systems?"

"How solid is the foundation?" Itachi glances at him. "They might try explosives."

The assistant scoffs at the thought. "I doubt that Sasuke would try something so…crass. Based on the abilities we observed, he's more likely to try and sneak in during the night. Our lighting systems will prevent him from using his abilities within the house. There are lights built into the walls that will prevent shadows from being cast." Kabuto had designed them himself. "Shadow-walkers are difficult to handle, but once you know the tricks, they become fairly easy so long as they retain their sanity."

Which obviously hadn't been the case here. This assistant wasn't helping his case with all that. Kabuto might as well have been screaming Sasuke had escaped and hadn't been a test subject, even without his powers. "I see." Itachi shrugs. "Well, still just in case."

Kabuto blinks, then shrugs, mirroring Itachi's motion. "Approximately ten feet thick. Steel supports and concrete foundation reinforced with nylon cable. Will that be sufficient to withstand damage?"

"I would say so." Itachi nods at him feigning relief. "I suppose we're done here for now." He half expected Orochimaru and Kabuto to be idiotic enough to jump two agents due to their family tree.

In a secluded corner of the first floor, well away from the few security cameras, Shisui waits for his cousin. Orochimaru was everything he hated in scientists, and none of what he admired. Their knowledge could certainly be used for good, and most often, it was. But then you got the bad apples, like Orochimaru, who wanted to know everything they could, no matter the cost in lives or dignity.

A cost which the snake didn't want to catch on camera, lest he be indicted. Which was convenient for holding a meeting right under his very nose. "…To stop him or not…" That was the question.
"After we deal with Sasuke, he won't know what hit him." Itachi vows to his cousin. "If we take him out though, Sasuke will know and he'll bolt."

"Yeah, I know." First, they'd grab the one most likely to escape, then they would focus on the two scumbags that they had ten times as many reasons to want to arrest. "I'm going to send a message to Jiraiya and see if we can expedite a warrant for their arrest in conjunction with the Canadian government."

Itachi nods. It made him feel a little bit better about the situation. Not much, but enough to get through the day.

Shisui hated to ask, but he had to. "You got something, didn't you?" Probably about Sasuke, and judging by his expression, nothing good. "What did they do to him?"

"I would rather not say." He really hoped that Shisui wasn't suicidal enough to press further right now.

So it was that bad… "I see." Itachi's emotions were flowing to the surface just enough that Shisui could catch hold of rage, revulsion, regret… He sighs, shaking his head. "After this assignment, I'm cashing in my vacation days and taking a good long break. You should come with me, and we can bring your new little boyfriend."

"I'd be very careful what you say to me." His voice was barely less than a growl. "I'm not in the mood to be patronized."

"Fine." Shisui places a hand on Itachi's shoulder and squeezes. "But I do need an update. Did you find anything relevant and important that I need to be aware of?"

Did everyone have a death wish? "He was kept captive for years. His throat was attacked at one point." He knew that Shisui was only trying to do his job, but apparently he would not be allowed the mercy of five minutes to compose himself. "Does that satisfy you?!"

It would have to do, though neither fact helped very much except to determine motive. "Alright. Then I want you stationed with Orochimaru tonight. I'll take Kabuto." No sense in assigning Itachi to the one who'd likely just pissed him off the most. "If you sense anything approaching, be ready to take them down. I'll cover Kabuto."

"Very well." He sighs as something else occurs to him. "They're all underneath the building and it's reinforced with ten feet of protection."

"I see." Then that meant there had to be another way in. The shed, maybe? It would be cliche, like in an old movie, but there was a reason that things were cliche. "Then we'll have to bring in some RCMP once we have these two and get all of them out of there." Who knew how long some of them had been down there. Orochimaru had been at this a minimum of fourteen years, of Shisui's math on Sasuke's abduction was right. "Alright, let's get into position. The clock starts when the sun goes down."

Itachi merely nods. Doing something productive would be helpful. He swiftly heads off to watch Orochimaru.

Finally, the end was in sight. It had taken Sasuke a few days to prepare for the trip and have everything he needed, as well as smuggle himself onto the airplane. After all, he could hardly go
through security with all of that metal on him, he'd just be advertising that he was going off to kill someone.

He takes a deep breath, breathing it out slowly as he focuses on the target. Two, three, maybe four jumps, and that's all it would take to put himself right in the middle of Orochimaru's house. He would avoid any security that he could, and dispose of any that he couldn't and refused to run. With these evil men, though...sometimes their security just refused to run because they wanted to get paid. Their greed superseded their conscience, and they didn't mind working for an evil man.

Kabuto would no doubt be in there, so Sasuke would just knock him off on the way to Orochimaru. The sniveling, grovelling, obsessive freak would be the first to go. Then, he would finally put this nightmare to bed.

A blade shines in the light of the setting sun as Sasuke crouches on the branch of a tree overlooking the house. He was too far from the security systems to be detected, and he'd already located the place to cut the surveillance on the outside. The signal needed to be interrupted, but with the magical jamming spiders that he'd gotten from a couple of Gaara's witch friends, there should be no warning that he was coming.

He tosses the first spider and moves in.

Orochimaru sits at his desk, going over the 'legitimate' paperwork associated with his experiments. Some of them truly were legitimate, done in concert with scientists from universities all across the world. After all, it was morning in the world somewhere, which meant that someone likely wanted this on their desk next to their morning coffee.

He glances up at the rather irate agent surveying the room. "Is there something on your mind, young man?" He glance over the agent, recognizing the masterful crafting that went into creating the being before him. He was as wondrous as Sasuke had been. Though perhaps a tad independent. The other one was also magnificent, but did not possess the ethereal grace that Itachi and Sasuke had.

"I would think that would be obvious." Slitting his throat and castrating him mostly. "I'm on the clock and trying to prevent you from being slaughtered." Unfortunately.

"Yes, of course." Orochimaru sighs, genuinely unhappy over losing his test subject. "I regret what happened to the child. Had I known that he lived after running into the wilderness, I would have sought him out and brought him back home."

"That matters little now." Itachi barely refrains from killing him on the spot. "What matters is he did survive and he wants you dead." For good reason.

"Yes, that is most unfortunate." Orochimaru wets his lips slightly, glancing over the young man once more, before returning to his paperwork. "And now he will be incarcerated where he can no longer contribute to scientific study." Such a pity, but he could always acquire another shadow-walker, no matter how rare they were.

"That's your concern, not that he wants to kill you?" He raises an eyebrow. "You have an interesting set of priorities."

"Would you rather that I be consumed by fear?" Orochimaru would never allow anyone that satisfaction. "I simply meant-"
The sound of a distant scream echoes through the hall towards the office, drawing yellow eyes towards the door as the lights flicker. "…It seems that your partner is not doing well at securing this place." He reaches for the gun holstered under his desktop, prepared to use it if somehow the security systems failed.

That was such a shame. Itachi would really mourn his death, he thinks to himself sarcastically. "Quite honestly, you disgust me." Itachi didn't bother to pretend to be professional. "Though I am obligated professionally to save your miserable life. Get somewhere safe."

Orochimaru's eyes narrow as he rises to his feet, pointing the gun towards the door as he sidles away from the one entrance to the room and into the corner furthest from the window. "It seems that manners are something lost on you Uchiha. A pity, as it hardly flatters your pretty face."

"I suppose you prefer manners to honesty." He shrugs. "Not the best trait for a scientist." Though it was hardly surprising.

A retort has no chance to leave Orochimaru's mouth as the door flies open and Shisui barges in, slamming it behind him. Not that it would do any good as the lights flicker again. "Itachi, he came out of nowhere, I couldn't even get a shot off before he disappeared." All he could feel was a massive wall of unbridled rage moving through the house. There was no order, no direction, it was just nowhere and everywhere all at once.

"The cameras are likely out." Itachi frowns at this. "We'll do our best to protect you, Dr. Sannin, but you may wish to say your prayers." Not that Itachi thought a deity out there existed despicable enough to care about Orochimaru, but still.

More screams echo through the house, clearly Kabuto's, along with shouts from a couple of the security guards who were too foolish to get out of this killer's way.

Shisui un-holsters his gun again, prepared to…what, try to put up a fight? Not that he thought he could. What he'd seen…it was like nothing he'd ever witnessed before. Kabuto had just been sucked into the darkness as all the lights in the hall went out. It was as though all of the shadows were alive and moving. Whatever stories there were about shadow-walkers, they clearly weren't enough to describe the real thing. And this one was…the term Wrath of God came to mind.

The lights in the room flicker, before going out entirely, only the light of the moon filtering into the large office to illuminate the pale faces within. And nothing short of pure malice fills the room as a body drops out of the ceiling and directly onto Orochimaru's desk.

Kabuto, his body bloodied and broken, fingers missing and his belly sliced open and organs spilling out. The smell of entrails and fresh blood wafts from over two dozen vicious stab wounds and one long slice across Kabuto's throat. This time, the killer had gone so far as to cut out Kabuto's eyes and tongue.

There was no way that Itachi was going to risk that sort of horrific death to save Orochimaru. "Shisui, retreat would be in our best interest." The sooner the better. The brutality was almost unlike anything that Itachi had ever seen. Save for Danzo.

The doctor, about to protest their lack of professionalism, takes a step forward, only to be stopped by a blade at his throat and a soft growl. "Orochimaru..." A rich baritone voice echoes from the shadows, accompanied by a pair of ruby eyes directly behind him. "I finally have you…"

Shisui had been going to agree, but clearly, the situation had changed drastically. He feared that retreat might no longer be an option, so he raises his gun, prepared for any sign that their target
might choose to come after them next.

"He wants Orochimaru." Itachi glances at Shisui. "He's not going to come after us." He grabs his
cousin and tries to make a run for it. Survival instincts were a powerful thing.

Behind the fleeing agents, shrieking screams and gunshots begin ringing across the grounds. Shisui
looks back over his shoulder, not letting go of his gun. "I've never seen anything like that before…"
And he'd seen a lot of gruesome shit whenever he got stuck working with the FBI.

Itachi nods in agreement. "He's not going to stop." There was too much rage. "Even with
Orochimaru dead, he won't stop. There's no way he can come down from that." He was too far
gone. The necklace would likely be useless. They'd be lucky to get any sanity from that creature.

Shisui takes a deep breath of fresh air as they race out into the bit of backwoods behind the house.
"How…what the hell could they have done to him to cause so much rage in one person…?" It
was…sad. So much anger, and Shisui had felt it. Sadness, loneliness, hope, fear, all mixed in under
the wall of rage.

He told Shisui to stop, but he just wouldn't. "You don't want to know." Why couldn't his beloved
cousin just shut up?! Itachi didn't want to think about what he had experienced. What he had seen.

"Yeah, but-" Shisui stops in his tracks, skidding through the grass and dirt as a familiar sensation
creeps up on them, the shadows twisting and turning in the hollows of the trees. "Itachi!"

"Damn it!" They had wasted too much time with Shisui's foolish questions. "We need to go!"

But the shadows before them twist and turn, materializing a body smelling of blood before them
with glowing red eyes. Red eyes filled with fading malice and blossoming with shock and wariness.
"Itachi?" The low growl softens as the voice rises a half octave.

"..." It couldn't be, but Itachi knew that voice. He knew what it sounded like when it moaned his
name. "Is it really you?" Could it really be his beloved Alex? The one who had sat in his lap and
moaned so sweetly for him…

Sasuke's eyes widen. "You-" He hadn't thought that Itachi would recognize him like this, but he
supposed he should have, his voice had cracked. "…What are you doing here?"

"Well, we were on a case." That and fleeing for their lives, but now that had changed. "I'd ask what
you were doing here, but that seems...unnecessary." Maybe.

Shisui curses under his breath. Shit! Itachi's new boyfriend was the killer!? Sasuke was actually…
"…Sasuke Alex Uchiha…Maeda was Mikoto's maiden name."

The ruby gaze darkens at the mention of that name, the red dimming back to a lustrous onyx. "…Yes." This was…everything he'd started to hope wouldn't happen, everything that he never wanted
Itachi to find out. "Itachi…I…" How was he supposed to justify his streak as a serial killer to
Itachi? Why should he have to justify it at all? But Itachi… His heart hurt, and it felt like the little
bits of happiness and light that Itachi had begun to rekindle there were slowly dying. The little
hopes and expectations for the future that he and Itachi had talked about going up in smoke. …
Itachi knew. Which meant that it was all over. He couldn't run anymore.

Blood runs sluggishly down his arm from where a stray bullet had hit while he brought his sword
down across Orochimaru's chest. On that arm, under the torn arm covering, lay a black crow in
flight. Itachi's eyes widen as he takes in sight of the crow. He knew what that meant, but how could
this be possible? His soulmate and his greatest enemy? Sasuke's eyes meet Itachi's, following their
gaze to the tattoo on his right arm. No...fate couldn't possibly be that cruel, could it?

"We need to get you cleaned up and to a hospital." Whatever else Itachi wanted to say, Alex's injuries took priority. "I'm assuming you didn't leave DNA at the scene."

Sasuke's eyes narrow slightly. "...I never do." He wasn't nearly so careless, not even in a fit of rage. Rage that...had finally been extinguished completely. But staring into Itachi's eyes now...he just felt empty. And sad. And so very...very lonely. "I don't go to hospitals either." He'd have to catch the first flight back to Toronto and get Gaara to fix him up. The bullet had gotten stuck, but at least that meant he'd take the evidence with him. "Besides, this isn't the first time I've been hit by a bullet." He was just really good at not dripping blood everywhere. It's why his arm-guards were so long. And absorbent. They caught all the dripping blood.

Itachi would have argued with that, but he doubted he could make Sasuke do anything at this point. "You really think that you can just walk around with a bullet inside you?" He'd ask how he could be so foolish, but adrenaline was a hell of a drug.

"It wouldn't be the first time." Sasuke chuckles wryly, but it was an empty laugh. "Gaara's asked me that before, usually while taking the bullets out." But...neither answer would solve their impasse. "...I'm sorry, Itachi...I didn't want you to know about this."

"He deserved to die and you'll be pleased to know that a rescue raid will be launched shortly." He sighs. "Just leave it to the proper authorities this time. I know why you did it." He'd seen the memories. "I might have done the same thing in your position, but my job means I can't condone this. So I'm going to pretend you escaped before we saw you...we'll talk later, when the bullet has been removed." And he'd had a chance to process it.

"Itachi..." Shisui had kept silent, allowing his cousin and...other cousin the chance to talk, but there was still the fact that they had a job to do, no matter how much Shisui didn't like it.

Sasuke's eyes flicker to Shisui, comprehension dawning in his eyes. "...This was your assignment, to catch the serial killer hitting targets all over the world." Maybe they'd gotten onto his trail with Gato. That had been pretty messy. "...I see." Well, it was about time someone had been sent, successfully, to catch him. His luck was going to run out sooner or later. He just hadn't expected his soulmate to be on the team that brought him in.

"I'm not going to turn you in, but you should leave now." He glances at Shisui. "Before he talks me out of that." There was a chance that Shisui still might. He wouldn't fight him though if Sasuke was already gone.

A flicker of sadness passes through the dark eyes, followed by an equally sad smile. Itachi was so sweet, such a good soulmate. But Sasuke knew what he'd done, and that someone was going to make him pay for it. Maybe this way...he could have a little peace first. His body starts fading piece by piece into the darkness, eyes locking with Shisui's, then Itachi's. "I hear that the killer you're after lives in Toronto. Small apartment, all by himself...if you try raiding it in a surprise attack, I doubt you'll find it too difficult to apprehend one criminal."

Itachi knew what Sasuke was doing. Knew he was too stubborn to listen to him. So he just nods. He wanted to shake some sense into him, but logic apparently would be damned as far as his fellow Uchiha was concerned. He'd talk to him later. When he didn't have a damn bullet in his body.

Once Sasuke disappears into the darkness, Shisui bites his lip, trying to hold in his groan of frustration. This had to be some kind of cruel joke. On both Itachi AND Sasuke. "They both match." Since when could both the soulmate and deadly threat tattoos match on the same two
people? That was...so contradictory.

And why did it have to be in a situation like this? Why did it have to be that Itachi's soulmate was going to, at a minimum, end up behind bars for the rest of his life? "...You know that if we don't bring him in, someone else will have to. I already sent the updates to Jiraiya yesterday with Sasuke's photo in them." Now he was wishing he'd held off. "If we don't come back with him, Sasuke's face will be up on the Interpol wall, as well as every federal law enforcement agency in countries he's hit." And considering Sasuke's resume, that was a lot of them. No matter where he went, he'd be hunted for the rest of his life.

"You act as though personal appearances can't be altered." Itachi gives Shisui a hard look. "Without DNA evidence, that picture is nearly useless as long as a disguise is suitably well done."

"Yes, but..." Shisui wasn't Itachi. In a situation like this, even if Sasuke was Alex, he wasn't going to censor his empathic ability. It had told him something very clearly. "He knew this is how it would end...that's why he invited us to go to his apartment and arrest him." His crusade was done, and so was his running. "He's not going to just let himself off easily after everything he's done, even if he doesn't regret it." Shisui didn't know whether to be impressed or frustrated. "He's got his honour, I'll give him that."

Itachi knew logically that Shisui was trying to help. Which was why he clenches his fists and quickly counts to a hundred in his mind before even beginning to formulate some kind of response. "Skip the criminal profiling and get to the part where you have a plan that doesn't end in Alex's death." He tastes something coppery and metallic against his tongue and it takes him a moment to realize it was his blood. He must have bitten his tongue too hard in frustration.

Shisui notes with grim amusement that Itachi had called Sasuke by his other name instead. "In the case...I'm going to need a few minutes." Not that a few minutes was going to matter when it was the middle of the night, no they weren't heading back to Toronto for at least a few days. After all, they had a mess to clean up here first.

So, he sighs and crosses his arms, closing his eyes as he walks around the grassy area. He'd already started putting together the profile and sending information to the CIA, as was his standard procedure. So they couldn't just sweep it all under the rug, or someone would dig all of this up again, and not only would Sasuke be on the chopping block, but the two of them as well. And if they were under investigation, then they wouldn't be any use to anyone, let alone to Sasuke.

Hm...but how could they erase Sasuke Uchiha and his crimes from the books so that Alex Maeda's identity wouldn't be compromised? Then a genius, but terrifying thought comes to mind. Though it could cancel out the risk of a global man-hunt, as well as put the case to rest. "If Alex Maeda is going to live...'Sasuke Uchiha' needs to die."

"You want to fake his death." Itachi frowns at that. "They'd still need a body Shisui." Whether they executed him or they left one on the side of the road somewhere there was no getting around that. "I suppose we could just say we got into a gunfight with him and won, but we'd still need a corpse." Unless Shisui was going to do something completely foolish. "...You can't be serious." Which he probably would, just to piss Itachi off.

"I have some thoughts on that, but I'll need to make a couple of calls just to be sure it'll work." If it didn't, then they would have to come up with something...anything else. And Shisui didn't want to see his cousin self-destruct because of this catastrophic turn of events. "If we can produce a body, even if only long enough for them to confirm his death, then as long as no one were to find out it was faked, we could get him out of there, and the case against him would be closed. And like you said, it's not like physical appearances can't be altered."
Immediately, Itachi wards his mind to the best of his abilities from his cousin. "Make the damn calls then." The last thing he wanted was Shisui to feel what he felt. He couldn't even process what he felt and Shisui's 'calmness' wasn't helping matters. "I'll set up our travel arrangements." It would give him something to focus on besides the disaster that was his and Alex's life at the moment. Something that Itachi knew he desperately needed.

It was probably a good thing that Shisui was being a professional at the moment. As much as he wanted to rage or scream or find some kind of outlet for his fury and despair, Itachi knew that he needed at least the illusion of a clear head to deal with this situation. If Shisui thought he'd 'lost it,' his cousin would do something stupid. Like trying to 'take him off the case' or something equally appalling 'for his own good.' If that happened, Itachi wasn't entirely sure that he would forgive him. So it was best to keep his mind closed off from Shisui. No matter how many red flags that probably sent to him.

Shisui sighs and takes out his phone, setting himself a reminder to make the calls at a more appropriate hour. "For now, we have a mess here to clean up. I'm calling the RCMP, and then we're heading down under that snake's den to release his slaves." Because there was no way that he was just going to leave without helping them first.

"Just start making the calls." Itachi sighs as he makes his way back towards 'the prison.' "I'll see what I can do to stabilize Orochimaru's victims." It was probably better this way. Itachi would have something to focus on that could actually help someone and he had an excuse to get away from his empath of a cousin.

He adds a quadruple level of protection to his mind just in case. Shisui should never feel what Itachi felt at the moment. No one should save for scum like Orochimaru and Danzo. Hell, Itachi didn't even want to feel his own feelings and would have turned them off completely if only he knew how. Was such a thing possible, he wonders to himself. He'd have to research the matter thoroughly later.

For now, he'd put his mind reading abilities to good use. The louder the mental screams, the greater the need for his assistance. At least he could be of use to someone. It wasn't the prisoners' fault that his soulmate was being an idiot and playing the part of a martyr. He wouldn't punish them for it.

Shisui watches sadly as Itachi disappears from sight, then hits the call button and presses the phone to his ear. "...Yes, I have an emergency. My name is Shisui Uchiha, I'm an agent with the CIA. My partner and I have found a massive slave prison just to the north of the city. I need whatever police officers you can spare, and at least four dozen ambulances." There was no time to waste, and it was best to get this hellish nightmare over with. They could deal with the rest of their problems back in Toronto.
Chapter 12

Chapter by celestia193

Chapter Notes

celestia193's Author's Note: There will be more on the state of Sasuke's psyche later. Mostly, this chapter is just going to be sad.

Never before had Shisui felt this exhausted after only a few days of working 'overtime'. So many had been locked away under that monster's mansion. And it had painted all too clear a picture of what Sasuke had gone through. And the screams...not just of the broken minds down there, but the shattered hearts... Honestly, Shisui couldn't understand how Sasuke had stayed this sane after all of that.

When he was young, he'd felt special when his gifts first appeared. He could tell what people were feeling, he could get the upper hand easily in a game of poker, could tell if people were bluffing, lying... But on the other hand, there were times like this when he wished he could just shut off everything and not have to feel any of it.

It had been a long plane ride, especially with Itachi staying similarly quiet. This past week had been overwhelming for them both. And now they would be jumping from the frying pan and right into the fire.

He sighs, glancing tiredly at his cousin. "How are you holding up?" Itachi had been shutting his emotions away where Shisui couldn't feel them, and that was just as worrisome as feeling the turmoil had been to begin with.

"I'd rather not say." It wasn't Shisui's fault and he was trying to help. "Do you have anymore specifics of the plan?" On some level, Itachi knew that and there were times when he tried to remind himself to be fair. It was just difficult to keep his emotions under control at all and talking didn't help.

Well, the dangerous indications as to Itachi's mental state aside, Shisui nods and leans back in his chair, his gaze drifting to the window as the city comes into sight. "I got in touch with a witch back home who should be able to supply us with a mixture that should do the trick. It can be injected, drunk, or inhaled. It usually only lasts for an hour, but she's working on extending that window. It'll likely take a few months before it's ready." But since they would be investigating for at least another month and a half, if not more, and then going through the lengthy court battle, he wasn't worried about their timeframe.

The word months causes Itachi to taste something extremely unpleasant in his throat. "Well, that's progress." It takes him a moment to realize those words had very nearly made him throw up. Though rationally, Itachi knew that any case like Sasuke's would take at least months, if not years to try. They had time.

Shisui nods. "I'm going to sweep the house for bugs when we get back." Then they would be able to talk freely. "You never know what could have crawled in."
He nods at that. The storm of emotions inside him didn't change the reality of the situation. They couldn't afford to be sloppy. "How long till we land?" Shisui apparently wanted to make conversation and Itachi knew that if he didn't give the other man something, Shisui's attempts to comfort him would do them both far more harm than good. So it was best to humor him. Slightly.

"Ten minutes, I'd say." Shisui was pretty sure that he could see the airport from here. "Then half an hour home." And then their plotting could begin in earnest. After all, there was more than one life hanging in the balance now. But there was very little that could stand in the way of an Uchiha genius when they put their mind to something. Heavens forbid that someone face TWO such geniuses.

A thorough sweep of the apartment turned up a number of bugs, and while Shisui wasn't really offended by it, it was certainly inconvenient. But hopefully, no one would know what was up once he isolated them and put them in a box to jam their signal.

Now they could speak freely, Shisui had made sure to go over the entire apartment three times, just for good measure. There was nothing left now for them to worry about. "Alright, so first, I suppose that you want to know about the potion that I'm having my witch friend brew up." He grabs one of the sandwiches from the large plate in the kitchen, famished after their very long week.

Itachi might as well save them both a lot of grief. "A quick, concise summary would be preferable." Shisui had a tendency to be too thorough sometimes. A trait that normally wouldn't be a problem. Hell it was even an asset to a point, but right now Itachi didn't want to hear more than the cliff note version.

"Fair enough..." Shisui takes a bite of his sandwich, considering how to make it as short as possible without leaving out any of the important details. "I already told you about how to administer it and how long it lasts, so that just leaves the effects. It acts something like a neurotoxin. It will freeze up his lungs and heart and stop all noticeable brain activity mimicking all of the essential elements of death without actually making them permanent. It's infused with a built in antidote on a time-delay. My friend is working on pushing back that time delay to give us more time to get him out of there without making it seem like we're trying to get him out of there suspiciously fast. What we still need to do is prevent them from attempting an autopsy once he's been declared dead."

It was genius, but risky. Extremely so, but what other choice did they really have. So Itachi nods at him as he tries not to focus on the fact Shisui was eating in front of him. After hearing just how his boyfriend would be 'poisoned,' Itachi once again was battling with the urge to vomit, something that usually hadn't been an issue for him before finding out the truth about Alex. His soulmate had a very high chance of dying before his next birthday. Suddenly, a perfectly healthy man in his prime felt like an elderly flu patient.

"In addition, we'll need to make sure we can get him back out of the country and away from the eyes of the CIA, or anyone else who might be able to identify him once this goes public." Shisui had been thinking about this a lot over the last few days. "That's where his vampire caretakers can come in. If they can spirit him back here, I'm sure that the feisty vampiress can make sure that no one ever connects their bartender to Sasuke. And if nothing else, vampires know how to make someone disappear."

"That's a disturbing way to put it, but accurate." Itachi nods at him. "Alright. Well, the plan is looking more solid than it did originally." Not that that was hard to do, but still. Progress was progress.
"That said..." And this was the part that left a bad taste in Shisui's mouth. "We still need to bring him in, question him thoroughly for the investigation, and then put together the case file to present to the court." Because as much as he didn't like it, they were providing information to the prosecution.

His lip was never going to be the same. "Shisui, please stop pointing out unpleasant facts that I already know." From all this biting. Hell, his lip was probably the least of his worries. He might have a heart attack at this rate.

Forgetting about the rest of his food, Shisui sidles around the kitchen island to sit next to his cousin, trying to offer some sort of support. "...Would you like to have a day with him, or should we just go and get this over with?" There wouldn't be another chance like this for months, at least. But Shisui would understand if Itachi didn't want to.

He might as well have asked Itachi if he would prefer an arm or a leg cut off. It might be the last chance Itachi would ever get to be alone with Sasuke without being overheard, but leaving him would be next to impossible. He'd only be torturing himself.

"I wouldn't." He wasn't a masochist. "I'll let Sasuke decide whether he wants to indulge in torturing us both with such a proposition or not." Itachi did at least owe his soulmate that much. He said Sasuke and not Alex because it was Sasuke who was going to be on trial.

Shisui took that as a decisive no. And he had a feeling that Sasuke wouldn't want to drag this out either. "Okay, then we'll go and see what he says. And if he wants to have a day with you...then I'll leave you two be and come see you at noon, tomorrow." A full twenty-four hours, so that they could do whatever they wanted, should they decide to have the time alone.

Itachi didn't know how to respond to that. He supposed Shisui thought he was giving them a kindness. It was a double edged sword though. Itachi knew that much, but he wasn't entirely sure about his cousin. So he just nodded.

The elder Uchiha sighs, unhappy with the despondent look on his cousin's face. "Let's go." After all, they'd received a personal invitation from their little serial killer himself to come over for a visit. There wasn't any point in putting any of this off.

It was time to catch themselves a shadow-walker.

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Gaara shakes his head. This was unbelievable. What was Sasuke thinking? Oh wait. He wasn't thinking. That was the problem.

"You DO realize that you are not ACTUALLY a vampire?" He carefully removes the bullet with his supernatural strength and bites his arm with his fangs. "That bullets can kill you?!" Causing two tiny rivers of blood to flow freely from the self-inflicted wounds. "Nevermind. Just drink." He forces his arm by Sasuke's mouth, knowing that his vampire blood would speed his healing rates.

Sasuke rolls his eyes at the old vampire, ignoring the throbbing, burning pain where Gaara had cut into the hardening flesh to get at the bullet. He'd have a scar, but he already had plenty of those. "Yes, I'm fully aware of that. But they haven't gotten me yet." He dips his head down, pressing his mouth to Gaara's arm and sucking crimson droplets from the pale skin. He didn't need reminding that bullets were dangerous, he was the one who'd smuggled himself into a plane's cargo hold for the trip home with the bullet still lodged in his arm.
That was only by dumb luck. Sasuke should have been dead at least a dozen times over by now. Surely, he had to see that.

"So they saw you then and let you leave?" Gaara finishes attending to Sasuke. "It may have been the shock, fear of your capabilities, his love for you, or some combination of those factors that did it. Still, I'm shocked they let you walk off." Which could only mean one thing. "You aren't seriously going to turn yourself in for killing that monster. Are you?" Gaara might drink blood, but he wasn't half the monster that someone like Orochimaru was.

"Not for his murder, no, but I've committed so many other murders that they could easily nail me on at least thirty of them." Probably more, but Sasuke didn't feel like thinking about that. "...Like you said, I'm not a vampire. I have no excuse for my behavior." None that the law would take, anyway. "So I told them where they could find me. Where they could find their killer. Because I know what kind of monster Orochimaru turned me into. And if I were accused of being too dangerous to allow the privilege of walking around free...they wouldn't be wrong."

Gaara shakes his head. He wanted to scream at Sasuke. Smack some sense into him. It wouldn't do any good though. "Well, I hope you know that decision doesn't just upset myself and my siblings," He sighs as he pours himself a shot of whiskey. "You're punishing your soulmate as much as you are yourself."

Yes, Sasuke knew that, but Itachi would be better off without him. He could have a normal relationship, a normal life...a wife and kids. He could have everything Sasuke never could. "I made my bed, Gaara. That doesn't mean Itachi has to sleep in it."

"It damn sure looks that way to me, Laddie." Great. Now his Irish was coming out. "He'll either be single for the rest of his life or have to settle for a knock off version. Whoever he ends up with will KNOW that he doesn't truly want to be with them. They'd be just another casualty. "Adding another innocent person to 'body count' so to speak. Oh and let's not even begin to factor in how the children will feel about the entire situation."

"And how is that worse than trying to make a relationship work with a deranged, traumatized, merciless serial killer?" Sasuke snaps, his temper heating quickly and coming to a boil. "I'm a murderer, Gaara, I have been for a long time. I can't be the kind of partner that Itachi needs. And I could never be socially acceptable, no matter how hard I try." Not like this... "Sasuke Uchiha is... nothing more than a monster now."

A monster that killed other monsters didn't sound so bad to him. Though there was no use reasoning with him. "You didn't kill anyone who shouldn't have been killed long ago." He shakes his head. "Itachi is a mindreader, he can tell that, but you're so intent on paying for your public service that you can't see anything else. So if you wish to march off to prison, I'm done trying to stop you."

Sasuke smiles, nodding slowly. "Thanks for trying anyway." He did appreciate it, no matter how little it swayed him. "I..." There weren't words in the world or actions he could take to thank Gaara for everything he'd done over the years. So, he decided on sarcasm. "Thanks for putting up with my obnoxious ass. You're lucky that you're a vampire, otherwise your hair would probably be turning gray."

"My hair color is really the least of my concerns at the moment." Gaara sighs and shakes his head. "Such a waste, but I can see you're bound and determined to be stupid."

"Of course I am, you know me better than to expect any differently." Moving his arm gingerly, Sasuke runs his fingers through natural, raven black hair. He had to take responsibility for his
actions. Otherwise...how was he any better than the people he'd killed? He didn't like the idea of going to prison, but at the very least, he could give the families of the people he killed some peace. Even if all of his marks were utter scumbags. Even scumbags might have someone who loved them.

He had Itachi...after all...

It was the most bizarre feeling. Wishing that Shisui wasn't there and being relieved that he was in equal measure. "Let's get this over with." Itachi sighs as he knocks on the door.

He wanted privacy without worrying about Shisui reading Sasuke's mind or even worse, his own. The younger Uchiha had no real way of knowing how long his shields would last against Shisui, if he tried to 'check on him.' Though the fact that Shisui was with him kept Itachi from giving into his impulse to grab Sasuke and run. Run away to the Amazon or some uncharted island or something. Anywhere but these wretched 'civilized' places.

The door opens slowly, revealing a young man dressed in a black sleeveless shirt and jeans that matched his raven hair and onyx eyes. "You came."

"You didn't really give us a choice." Itachi enters Sasuke's home without waiting for a second invite.

No, Sasuke supposed he hadn't. But it's not like he was in the habit of giving out choices like candy. He glances at Shisui and steps aside as the older agent strides respectfully into the small, barren apartment.

He'd only taken a glance around this place, and Shisui was already set on edge. There was just...nothing here. A little furniture and the faint smell of food, but little else. Everything essential was put away in drawers, and there wasn't a single picture hanging up. It felt so...sterile. It was hard to believe that anyone lived here. And yet, Sasuke lived here...all alone.

The door shuts behind them and Sasuke watches quietly as his...guests find the living room. Part of him had expected them to just cart him off. Having them actually in his apartment was a bit unsettling.

Silence hangs heavily in the air, so Shisui finally breaks it. "I've...offered this to Itachi already, but if the two of you would like to have a day to...settle things..."

Sasuke's dark eyes flick towards Itachi uncertainly. After what he'd done...he doubted that Itachi would want to take that sort of offer. "...If it's what you want."

Irritation pricks at Itachi. "I believe we both know that what I want matters very little." Sasuke had more than proven that. "I decided to give you the choice as we know where your turning yourself in will lead you. Whether you want a happy memory that will be cut short before you indulge in your foolish martyr tendencies or you decide you truly aren't that much of a masochist, is entirely up to you."

A resounding no, then. He might not have said it, but it was clear that Itachi didn't want to chance it and have his heart broken even worse. Sasuke could respect that. "Then my answer is...no."

Besides, one happy memory wasn't going to overwrite everything that had happened, everything Sasuke had done.
He didn't know whether to be relieved or upset at Sasuke's answer. His lip was already no doubt bleeding, but Itachi cared little. Perhaps he should just have Sasuke's friend turn him into a vampire. Maybe if he became one, he wouldn't have to worry about anything other than thirst for awhile. The thought was a disturbingly appealing one. "Shisui do you want to get the interrogation over with now?" Itachi glances at his cousin.

While it was a tempting suggestion, Shisui shakes his head. "No. You know that we at least have to follow protocol for that." Which meant taking him back to the CIA, where he could be interrogated and cross-examined properly. If they didn't, they could invalidate some of the evidence.

"Remind me again why I ever joined this organization?" There had to be a reason. "Never mind. That was a rhetorical question." He turns his gaze back to Sasuke, feeling almost guilty for his anger. "Do you need to do anything before we leave? Is there anyone you wish to say goodbye to?" As far as Sasuke was concerned, he was now essentially on death row and Itachi's frosty reception was likely of little comfort to him. It was just...well, he didn't know how else to react without going insane.

Sasuke's gaze drops to the floor, his arms crossed over his chest and his fingers going numb. "...No, I've done everything that I need to." Not that he had much in the way of affairs to put in order.

He hated keeping the secret from him, but the more people that knew about the plan the greater the chance of failure. That and Itachi didn't want to give him false hope. If something went wrong... Well, he'd rather not think about that. "Do you wish to stay another night and leave in the morning then?" Itachi could offer him that much at least.

"...It doesn't matter." Sasuke had no attachment to this apartment. He had nothing left to do. No one to see. Staying another night was really only delaying the inevitable.

"Then I'll make the arrangement to get us back to headquarters." For 'proper' questioning that would follow the oh so sacred protocol. The very same protocol that hadn't done a damn thing to save Sasuke or those children in the first place.

Glancing at the arm coverings concealing his tattoos, Sasuke fiddles with them. He couldn't let anyone see what was underneath them, but he knew they would have to move. So he slides them up several inches, not enough to bare the tattoos, but enough to expose his wrists. "...No one can know."

Shisui smiles sadly. "I know."

"We'll keep them from seeing your tattoos." Itachi sighs.

Shisui approaches Sasuke slowly, cautiously. "Would you...rather it be me or Itachi?" Sasuke seemed skittish enough about letting people touch him, and Shisui didn't want to make it worse by accident.

Swallowing a lump in his throat, Sasuke looks determinedly away from Itachi. He couldn't make the man touch him again, not now...not when it would hurt too much. "You do it."

Feeling the emotions whirling slowly within Sasuke, Shisui nods and extracts two shining metal rings from his jacket and slides them onto Sasuke's wrists, covering what he thought were old chafing scars. That didn't bode well... "Sasuke Uchiha...you are under arrest..." A single press of the tiny red buttons in the bracelets whirrs them into action, spreading them all along four inches of Sasuke's forearms and snapping together with a metallic clink, like a couple of magnets. Special restraints for...stronger people. "You have the right to remain silent..." Though Shisui both hoped
and dreaded that he wouldn't.

"I know." Sasuke stares at the wrist bindings apathetically. At least these ones looked nicer and fit more snugly than his old ones.

Itachi takes out his cell phone. "I need the fastest flight available from Toronto, Canada to Langley, Virginia." He couldn't believe he was doing this. "Price is no object and I don't care what class it is. Three tickets."

Right to the centre of it all, then. Sasuke knew well that Virginia held the headquarters for not only the CIA, but the FBI, and the military investigative organization, and was little more than a stone's throw way from the president in the capital. It was nothing short of a fortress. He lowers his voice to barely more than a soft whisper. "...He's going to hate me now, isn't he?"

Shisui's heart clenches painfully and he sighs. "Itachi could never hate you. He just hates what you're doing." And while Shisui couldn't blame his cousin for feeling this way, he didn't like the way that all of this was driving them apart.

Sasuke smiles sadly. "It's okay if he does. He should." It would be easier for Itachi that way. Without having to worry about the fate of a criminal that he should have had nothing to do with in the first place.

Itachi pretends not to hear that with his ears or with his magic. He flinches as though struck with an arrow, but thankfully Sasuke and Shisui were far too absorbed in their conversation to be paying attention to his body language. That or they weren't cruel enough to comment on it.

"So what is the next flight?" They were going to try to save him. "Like I said, the sooner the better." This felt like his own death sentence though and it was driving him to insanity. Thank goodness for mental wards.

An automated voice responds after a brief moment. "One direct flight departs from Pearson International Airport at 4 PM. One flight with connection in Washington departs at 6 PM. One private plane is available for charter this afternoon."

"We'll take the private plane." That was the best option for someone like Sasuke.

The voice pauses a moment, before whirring back into action. "Very good, Sir. Are there any special considerations for your passengers?"

Other than his soulmate was a serial killer and he was going insane? "No special considerations other than we want the fastest route possible." No. Not really.

"Very good, Sir. Payment will be processed at the terminal. What time would you like to depart?"

"We'll be departing as soon as we can get there. An hour should be sufficient time." He nods.

The automated voice whirs one last time. "Very good, Sir. Your flight will be prepared to leave one hour from now. Your flight crew will consist of one attendant and a cockpit crew of two. Carry on and check-in are permitted. Please proceed to private hangar four and present your identification en route. Thank you, and have a nice day."

It was a bit disturbing how far automation had come recently. Itachi could foresee a lot of jobs were about to be lost as soon as the average business owner figured out how to make machines cheaper than human labor for mundane tasks. Never mind. That was a matter for another day. "Let's get going." He sighs. "We have an hour."
Shisui nods and gently guides Sasuke towards the door. "Is there anything you want us to bring?"

Considering it for a moment, Sasuke nods slightly, tilting his head towards the table and chairs in the small dining room. "I packed a bag with clothes, just in case..." Just in case they actually let him wear his own clothes in there.

Itachi picks up the bag on the chair with Sasuke's clothes in it and leads them outside. They didn't have any time to waste.

Shisui sighs and brings up the rear, grabbing the key from the small hook next to the door and locking the apartment behind them. He would send Gaara a message and tell him where to find it.

He already knew that this was going to be a very long flight.
There were some things that just couldn't be unseen. What Sasuke had done to Kabuto and Orochimaru's corpses was one of them. Even if most of it came from the crime scene photos taken by two other agents, then faxed to the FBI for processing it was still hard to look at the carnage that Sasuke could cause.

But Shisui couldn't dwell on the gruesome details for now. Right now, he and Itachi were compiling a list to run by Sasuke, trying to get a full breakdown of every person he'd ever killed. The families needed closure, after all. Even if their relatives were scumags.

The list was a long one and was teaching Itachi not to judge a book by its cover. Sasuke might very well be one of the most prolific killers in history, but only of those whom Itachi couldn't blame him for eliminating.

"So, clearly not a psychopath." After meeting Sasuke, Shisui had thrown the original diagnosis out the window. "But definitely suffering from trauma, and maybe some kind of mental illness." Though that was a very broad term, and could mean anything from psychosis to depression to ADHD. "He definitely suffered from some pretty intense rage, though." Which was especially evident when comparing the remains of some of the victims.

"Accurate." Itachi didn't want to weigh in on this. "It seems that the profile is rather complete short of questioning." He was barely refraining from vomiting at everything his cousin had been through and done.

"Yeah." The part that Shisui was not looking forward to putting Sasuke through. "By the way…" Speaking of interrogations, he was sure that their department was due for one rather soon. "I… spoke with Uncle Madara a couple of hours ago."

"Are you suicidal?" He glares at Shisui. "What is wrong with you?!"

Shisui crosses his arms, grimacing. "He's the de-facto head of the family, so I didn't have much choice but to tell him that we had Sasuke in custody and facing over a hundred murder charges."

The last thing that Itachi wanted was for his father to get involved in this. "I suppose you're right." Though Shisui had a point, the younger Uchiha couldn't help but feel a little bitter that Shisui had tattled on him.

"I'm not entirely sure what it is that he wants, but..." Shisui frowns. "I think he's curious about Sasuke's personality." And probably his body count, too.

He couldn't fault Madara for that much. Who wouldn't be? Still, Itachi didn't like this one bit. "What's done is done." He sighs. "All we can do is warn Sasuke ahead of time."

"Itachi?" A powerful, rumbling voice echoes across the entire floor. "Shisui?"

"...Or not." Shisui hadn't expected the man to arrive quite this fast. "...He must really want to meet our cousin."
It was hard not to fall over on his ass when he heard his father's voice. "Father, please don't...be excessive." Who was he kidding? This was Madara Fucking Uchiha. "Sasuke's been through a lot." Excessive was his middle name.

Madara chuckles as he makes his way towards the source of his son's voice. "I'm sure the boy can take it. Isn't he an Uchiha after all?" He glances at the...project the two of them are running and raises a single eyebrow at the extensive nature of the list. "...Apparently so. If nothing else, he exceeds all expectations when it comes to his craft."

"That's one way to put it." Itachi sighs.

It wasn't often that someone impressed Madara Uchiha with their feats, but this boy...this child was something else entirely. "I would like to meet him."

This wouldn't end well. Not that Itachi could stop him though.

Shisui knew better than to try to stand against the force that was Madara Uchiha. And so did Jiraiya, though he could certainly use the man's name to try and stall for time. "We would have to run that past our boss. Sasuke's not permitted to have visitors at the moment." He had tried to tell the man as much earlier, but that clearly hadn't worked nearly as well as he'd hoped.

"Yes, Shisui is right about that much." Itachi smiles nervously at his father. "You understand. Protocol and all that."

Madara raises an eyebrow at the resistance coming from his son and nephew. "I see..." Well, there were other ways to get what he wanted. "Very well, then I will arrange the visit with Jiraiya. I'm sure that he will be able to expedite the process greatly." He sweeps himself from the room, disappearing down the hall towards the department head's office.

Shisui rubs the back of his head, not at all surprised by the man, but not pleased either. "Shit."

"Damn it." They were so screwed.

Sasuke was tired...so...so tired. The room was hot and bright, and the only relief he had was the thin mask over his eyes that kept out the worst of the glare. Clearly, these people were too smart. They didn't trust him, of course, but they'd made him the same sort of cage that Orochimaru had. Light panels in the ceiling, floor, and walls, always turned on, and preventing the casting of shadows. Not that he was going to try and flee. He just didn't like being bound and trapped in a room where he couldn't even pass the time by sleeping. He'd been awake...what, thirty-six hours already?

If they were trying to induce hallucinations, they were going about it the right way.

A soft thumping approaching the door catches Sasuke's drifting attention, not that he can pay it much attention with his eyes closed beneath the thin blindfold.

"There you are." Madara walks over to his cell and takes stock of the boy. "You're certainly Mikoto's son. Though I do see some Fugaku in you as well." The resemblance to his mother was striking in particular.

Tilting his head slightly towards the sound of this man's voice, Sasuke frowns behind the mask. "And I should care, because?"
"I am Madara." He looks at him. "I am the head of our family." The boy would learn soon enough.

Sasuke grows quiet, head tilting back down towards the necklace Itachi had hung around his neck. "...Your family...you don't even know me." Itachi and Shisui...well, Shisui did know him, sort of. But he'd ensured that Itachi didn't anymore. The man was acting as a concerned cousin, nothing more.

He shakes his head. "You have much to learn about our family." Madara smiles at him. "Blood is thicker than water."

A scathing laugh leaves Sasuke's lips. "Well, that didn't seem to matter to the people you call my parents when they sold me to Danzo to be handed off to Orochimaru."

Madara looks at him aghast. "You were never sold by Mikoto and Fugaku." How could he think such a thing? "While I didn't approve of Fugaku marrying outside the family and moving away from us, he never would have condoned such a thing and neither would his wife."

Dark eyes containing a deeper darkness rest behind the cloth binding. "You say that they didn't sell me? Is that supposed to make me feel better? Sold or abandoned, I still had to live in that hellhole for seven years. The lucky ones died early, and I was one of the only ones to survive that place and that snake's experiments."

"Boy, I don't know what lies you've been told, but you were declared dead years ago." Madara's expression hardens. "How can someone abandon a dead child? There was a body and DNA evidence. Orochimaru can be quite thorough when he wants something."

Sasuke's inner mind suddenly calms to a dead silence. Absolutely dead. "...I was ten years old, alone, and being told that every single day. I suppose whether it's true or not doesn't matter anymore. I haven't had parents since I was still a naive child. The closest I have to family are the vampires who rescued me and took me in. So don't you dare try to defend the importance of blood and family to someone who has none."

His eyes glow a vibrant ruby red, shining even through the blindfold around his eyes. "My abilities are all that connects me to you, because all of you were fooled by him and left me to die in that place."

His magic was powerful, but rage was fueling it. "I can only imagine what you went through, but it would be foolish to allow him yet another victory over you." There was no mistaking it. "If you wish to just be alone in prison and have nothing to do with our family and deprive yourself once again of what you're entitled to, that would be a sad choice. You'll be allowing him to win even in death, but that is something entirely up to you."

The shadow-walker grows quiet, considering those words, and mulling over the same answer he'd comes to dozens...hundreds of times before. "...I am where I'm supposed to be. I kill criminals, but in doing so, I become one of them. Who am I to pretend to be better than them? My reasons may be different, but in the end, I'm doing the same things that most of them did." Not all of them, because some of them did truly heinous things that Sasuke could never do. "Would you just let a killer with a body count of over a hundred people go unpunished?" He DID have a conscience, after all.

"If it was up to me, you would be getting a damn medal." Madara sighs as he shakes his head. "You're doing what should have been done a long time ago. Perhaps more...violently than most would approve of, but still."

Sasuke snorts. "Perhaps? I know how violent I've gotten. No one with any decency would approve of the lengths I've gone to. I tipped over that edge a long time ago." And that's why this didn't make any sense. "So why are you here visiting a dangerous, merciless killer? Curiosity? Some twisted
sense of family duty? Or have you just never seen a helpless shadow-walker before?" After all, in this cell made of light panels that didn't cast a single shadow, he wasn't going anywhere.

Madara's eyes narrow at him. "Boy, don't sass me. If you think that you're the first Uchiha who uses biting sarcasm as a defense mechanism, you're sorely mistaken." He had practically invented it.

Growing quiet once more, Sasuke leans his head back against the wall, feeling uncomfortably warm from all of the energy being pumped into the room. He hadn't slept at all since being put in here, and he didn't envision sleeping any time in the near future. "...Then why are you here? I haven't even been part of your distant family for fourteen years. You should have just washed your hands of me as soon as I was brought in. After all, this is a big moment for Itachi and Shisui. You should be happy with your son and nephew for bringing in such a dangerous killer and so quickly, regardless of what their last name might be."

"Because you are family." He shakes his head and sighs. "And not so long ago, I could have easily been in your position had my brother not cooled my temper."

Sasuke blinks, a little poleaxed by that suggestion. "...What was your excuse?"

"I was in the military." He smirks at Sasuke as though reliving some memory. "I didn't always agree with the orders, I was given. Fortunately, I had Izuna."

...Wait a minute... "Is that why Itachi thought I was in the military?" Wait, shit, no one was supposed to know about that. Sasuke mentally smacks himself for his stupidity. "Nevermind. What happened with your brother and your orders?"

"I'll spare you the details, but essentially he convinced me otherwise." He shakes his head in amusement. "I climbed up the ranks and ended up giving the orders after a time."

Sasuke didn't know the man well, save for what Itachi had told him while he still knew Alex, but there was something he recognized in the man and it makes him smirk. "I bet you loved giving orders, didn't you?" Madara struck him as the kind of man who enjoyed having people do his bidding.

"Of course, I did." Who wouldn't? "Anyone that says they don't, they're lying." If nothing else, he was an honest man.

"I don't know about that. There's a vampire I know, mated to one of the vampires who rescued me, and he'd probably say that having to give people orders is a drag, and that he'd rather take a nap." The thought of Shikamaru actually wanting to give people orders was one that Sasuke just couldn't get his head around. The vampire was lazier than a fat housecat.

"That is not a vampire." Madara rolls his eyes at that the very notion. "That is a koala bear with fangs." Fangs that probably wouldn't even leave a mark at that.

"Probably, he acts like he's stoned most of the time." Sasuke can't help but smile at the thought of his vampire family. "Which would explain why he's mated to her, she's a bit of a dominatrix. She's the one who would agree with you about giving orders." After all, she gave him orders all the damn time.

"I would steer clear of vampire dominatrixes." He didn't have any fear of blood, but Madara would prefer it not to be his own.

Sasuke shrugs, sort of. It was hard to do that while bound. "She just forces me into her chair all the
time to put makeup on me and dye in my hair. I'm her favorite living mannequin."

Madara blinks. Honestly, that was disgraceful. "I'm not certain why you allow such behavior." It was so utterly absurd.

Sasuke glares at Madara through the blindfold, feeling the judgment pouring off the older man. "Because I don't mind punk, and the blue streaks grow on you after a while. Be glad I didn't let her start with the piercing, because after that, I'm pretty sure she would have started on tattoos. She's run a few beauty salons and tattoo parlors in her time."

"I suppose that such eccentricities are...understandable to a degree." Well, at least it wasn't pink streaks.

"Yeah...at least she never followed through on the pink hair threat." Sasuke would NEVER have lived that down.

She was a cruel one, even for a vampire. "She actually threatened that?" Unbelievable. What was wrong with vampires these days?

Sasuke flushes slightly. "Uh...yeah...she threatened to dye my hair pink when I complained about the electric blue. And I'm not stupid enough to piss off a vampire. Especially one that likes me." She could have made things extremely uncomfortable for him, because she would never dream of killing him, so she'd have to find a plethora other ways to humiliate him into submission.

It seemed the boy went from one torture to the next. "I see. The woman is psychotic." Which was saying something as he had a very loose definition of that word.

"No, she just really likes playing with my hair. Something about it being soft and not needing any gel to style it." Sasuke didn't really care, he just got her to cut it whenever it got too long. "...Itachi liked it too..."

"An odd thing for one of the agents that brought you in to say." Madara shakes his head in amusement. "Though I suppose he is your cousin and it is rather nice hair."

"Oh I see." So the two had met prior to their final confrontation, and now things had grown strained now that the truth had come out. Though it wasn't like Itachi to be so close with someone he had never met before. Madara ponders his son's rather interesting behaviour with this youngster. "Well, that is rather complicated to say the least."

"Complicated?" Sasuke snorts. "Complicated is putting it mildly. Complicated is having two of your distant cousins come to another country to arrest you for being a serial killer. This...situation...it left complicated in the dust a while back."

"What?" Sasuke looked like who now? "I look like your brother?"

Madara nods. It was a bit unnerving really. "You could have passed for his twin actually." He
chuckles as he reaches into his wallet and pulls out an old photo. "This was him when he was about your age."

It was a bit fuzzy through the blindfold, but Sasuke manages to make out a young man in a very old picture. Who still carried those around anymore? But it was almost disturbing how much he looked like Sasuke himself. So this was Izuna… "That's…so weird." Right down to the damn spikes, actually, only Izuna paired them with a sleek ponytail, just like Itachi's. "And Itachi sure wasn't kidding. He said that you were like a lion that turned into a human." That mane was… impressive.

Madara chuckles at that. Itachi was still Itachi. It didn't matter how old he got. Some things would never change. "Yes, it is amazing how much you look like him." He shakes his head. "Itachi always said that even when he was a toddler. I suppose it's accurate enough." He raises an eyebrow at the boy who looked so much like Izuna. "Though don't you have more pressing concerns to deal with?"

Sasuke's dimmed gaze drops to the floor. "Like what?"

"The fact you'll be fortunate not to end up on death row?" Honestly, he must be in shock. "I can manage to get you off of that much at least though."

"I know that they'll make an appeal to execute me under the international amendment to the abolition of the death penalty concerning exceedingly dangerous killers." Sasuke wasn't stupid, he'd known for a long time now what would happen when he finally got found out.

Honestly, the boy was acting like this was Madara's first rodeo. "I'm aware of that." He wouldn't be cowed that easily. "I'm also aware that we're dealing with a bunch of idiots."

"Be careful, the walls have ears." Sasuke was under no illusions as to whether or not he was under surveillance. There's no way they would be stupid enough to not watch him. "I've been evading these idiots who can't do their jobs for a long time." If they could, a lot of pain and torment could have been avoided. Maybe not for him, but for others, at least. "I know how they work."

Madara shakes his head. "Well, I suppose it's not your fault." The boy probably had no recollection of what it meant to be an Uchiha. "You'll learn soon enough not to underestimate our family."

"Yeah, I learned that firsthand when Itachi and Shisui showed up at Orochimaru's place before I did." Now THAT had been a surprise. "I still have to wonder just how they got my trail, though." That was the big mystery, after all. Sasuke knew that Itachi was psychic, a telepath, and that he was a spirit medium himself, but as for the range of the Uchihas' psychic abilities...Sasuke was largely in the dark. "Not that it matters...they still found me." Which brought him here, to a place he didn't really like, talking to a man who assumed a lot, and wasn't going to take no for an answer. "Why would you bother trying to help the vicious serial killer that Itachi and Shisui managed to collar after a whole five years of being out there, killing people? Shouldn't you be proud of their accomplishment instead?"

"They were doing their jobs." He shrugs. "I'm proud of their skill, but we both know that you did far more good by dispatching those scumbags than this organization has done in its entire history." Madara looks straight at the cameras, he knew were undoubtedly there. "I dare ANY of you to argue with me, when you see what your 'upstanding citizens' were doing to children while you sat behind your desks and filed paperwork."

Sasuke's eyes widen at Madara's sheer audacity. Then he can't help but snort in amusement. "Somehow, I don't think that's going to help make them more positively inclined towards me. If
anything, they might push harder to cover up their own failure. That's all bureaucrats are good for."

"They expect you to suck up, rage, or cower at them." He shakes his head. "Telling them the truth is the fastest way to shock them into doing their actual job."

The amusement in Sasuke's voice drains away in an instant. "Well, considering that I let Itachi and Shisui arrest me, they're not going to end up getting any of those things. I know what I've done, and I'm prepared to face the consequences."

"There are few things more annoying than a martyr." Madara rolls his eyes. "Well at least one that doesn't have to die for their cause but insists on falling on their sword anyway."

"I don't expect you to understand, and I'm not asking you to, either." Sasuke leans back against the wall, his voice hard and flat. "I played God with a hundred and forty-eight people. I have no right to complain when someone decides to play God with me. I would rather than to live like a hunted or caged animal for the rest of my life."

"Maybe you did." Madara glances at him. "Though by taking their lives, you probably saved at least ten times that many. I suppose it depends what kind of scale one is looking at."

"True, but that doesn't negate it." Though this was sounding just like the kind of spiel that Itachi had given him on the flight down. He could imagine every word coming out of his soulmate's mouth instead. "Now I know where Itachi gets his manner of speech from. You sounded just like him."

"I should hope so." He raises an eyebrow. "The boy carries half my genetic makeup and I did help to raise him." He shakes his head. "I've killed far more people than that. Sasuke. Instead of putting me on death row for doing the exact same thing that you did, they promoted me and gave me medals. The only difference is I wore a uniform."

Finally, Sasuke smiles wryly. "Then I guess that's the difference between you and me. You did it under orders, and I became an angel of vengeance." though angel was probably stretching it...a lot. Then he sighs, closing his eyes and vainly hoping that his exhaustion might take him away. "...You know about the crow and the magnolia?" He didn't dare say that they were Itachi's tattoos, not with a camera watching.

"I didn't." He blinks, a few pieces of this god-forsaken puzzle falling into place. "Until now." That did explain Sasuke's mention of Itachi's comment about his hair.

"They...should never be found in the same place. They were never meant to be." It was too cruel, and Sasuke hated that Itachi had been thrown into his mess like this. "...Make sure that he doesn't do anything stupid when his magnolia wilts."

"I will never understand you." He glares at Sasuke. "You chose to give up your life to 'justice' for filth over the man you supposedly love."

"No, I've been on this path a long time. I made my choices long before any of them mattered like that." The only way Sasuke could have been that free is if he had never gone down this road in the first place. And he made those choices years ago, before he ever even knew Itachi existed. "I was alone long before he was ever a factor."

"Yes, well I'm going to be alive after you're gone at the rate you're going." He looks at Sasuke. "Considering the hand that you're dealing him, my son will be nothing but an empty husk at best. I hope that justice for the scum that you killed was worth my son's sanity, if I don't manage to save
Sasuke lowers his head, with no rebuttal to offer now. "Do what you want. Just tell him...that I'm sorry I was such a disappointment."

"Does he even know?" His submission only enrages Madara further. "You don't have to lay down like a dead dog or damn him to this. You could at least TRY to survive."

"...He knows." Though Sasuke wished that Itachi was still in the dark.

Madara sighs and crosses his arms. "If you insist on being an idiot, it's a fine mess that you are leaving me." Even if he somehow kept Itachi alive, it would at best be a half life.

"...I know." Sasuke grows quiet, the guilt weighing heavily on his heart. "And I'm sorry."

"If you were actually sorry, you'd fight." He shakes his head. "I don't know what they did to you while you were under Orochimaru's 'care.' I can scarcely imagine what horrors you were subjected to, but I do know one thing." He gives Sasuke a hard look as he heads towards the door. "You may have killed him, but you're allowing him to win even in death now." He had to get out of here before he lost control.

Sasuke listens to the door open, then slam shut. He sighs, holding on to the few comforting memories his heart still had. And that heart ached with loneliness and despair. "Fuck..."
As he and Itachi continued to work on putting together the case file in their work room, Shisui could feel the disturbance in the force caused by his uncle's approach. There was just a power about Madara Uchiha that was unmistakable. And predictably, Sasuke and Madara had not had the most pleasant of conversations, what with Sasuke's growing depression and Madara's inability to deal with people who no longer cared to live. It was hard to watch and feel as Sasuke sunk deeper and deeper into his own pit of darkness, but their plan was coming together, one tiny piece at a time. They just needed to keep it from getting out, and they would be fine.

Shisui takes a deep breath and glances at his partner in crime. "Brace yourself, the lion is on the prowl." And this time, they were the prey.

Itachi gives him a dirty look. "I'm well aware." He sighs and shakes his head. "It would be best if you didn't speak unless spoken to while dealing with him."

With a roll of his eyes, Shisui can't help but smile. "Yes, Your Majesty." Itachi could be so formal sometimes. "Would you like tea with that?"

"Shisui, I think you need an immediate psychiatric evaluation." He shakes his head. "Isn't that your job?" He smirks at Itachi, not at all afraid to poke at his cousin. "You're the forensic psychologist, so I'm sure that psychoanalyzing me would be more fun than some of the profiles you've seen."

"I'd rather not have to analyze you." Itachi rolls his eyes. "I don't feel like going insane myself."

Shisui chuckles at his cousin's respect, fear, and extreme annoyance with the way his mind worked. "Don't worry, you'll join me soon enough. It's only a matter of time, and it happens to every Uchiha." Though his lights-heated tone fades somewhat as the door bangs open and a wild-looking man strides inside for the second time that morning.

"It is a very long story." Itachi shakes his head as he pre-empts his father's questions. "I'll be happy to brief you over dinner." Hopefully, his father would read between the lines. The message being that Itachi didn't wish to discuss the case in front of cameras.

"Very well." The eldest Uchiha's eyes flick from his son to his nephew. "Will Shisui be joining us?"

"That...might be a conversation best had between the two of you." That, and even Shisui knew in his gut to tread carefully around Madara Uchiha. "I'll stick around here a while longer and put some more details together." After all, even if a small tweak only brought the chances of success up by one percent, the more he could find to tweak, the better. Forget eggshells, he was treading on butterfly wings.

Itachi nods and gestures for Madara to follow him. The sooner he briefed his father, the easier this would be on all of them.
The drive to the quaint little French restaurant was silent, and Madara had spent it analyzing Itachi's expressions and body language. And despite the fact that his soulmate was apparently facing a likely sentence of execution, Itachi was not hysterical in the slightest. But he was certainly...tense as the two of them sat down and ordered. "You seem to have forgotten to mention that you had found your soulmate when you went to Canada on assignment." A rather important thing to just happen to forget to mention.

"I've been rather busy as of late." Itachi shakes his head. "Trying to save said soulmate." How could he explain this without sounding like a madman? "We have a plan, but he doesn't know about it."

Of course he didn't, and Madara couldn't see such a stubborn, foolish boy going along with their plan quietly, whatever it might be. "I offered the child a chance to have his punishment reduced as he is likely to end up dead by the end of this. But it seems that he doesn't wish to be saved from his 'crimes'."

Itachi clenches his fists. "He's stubborn." His bizarre notion of honor might get him killed.

Clearly. Though this stubbornness might very well get the boy killed, and Itachi along with him. But unlike the boy in that cell, Itachi had strength left in him. "I take it, then, that the two of you have a plan to keep the boy from falling on his own sword and taking you along with him?"

Itachi nods. It was best not to give too many details in a restaurant, but Madara had gotten the most important points. "I like to think so." He had to or else Itachi would start raging and he would never stop. "We've got time to work out the specifics, but the general plan is in place."

Noting the grim look on his son's face, a few rather...unorthodox thoughts occur to Madara. He hoped he was wrong but...knowing Itachi and Shisui's penchant for getting themselves into more trouble than they could dig themselves out of alone... "...Tell me, should I be advocating on his behalf, or washing my hands of him and staying out of legal procedures?"

He didn't like the answer. "As of now, it would be best not to do so." They had to get him on death row to save him. God what had Itachi's life become?!

"I see." Goodness, this boy was going to give everyone around him a heart attack. "Then what should I tell Fugaku and Mikoto when I inform them that their son is alive and awaiting trial in the Supreme Court for multiple counts of murder?"

Itachi gulps at that. He didn't entirely know. It seemed cruel, but if something went wrong and Sasuke died without ever seeing them again that would be even crueler. Wouldn't it? "I'm not entirely certain." He gulps down his wine almost faster than one could blink. "Though I suppose there is a moral obligation to tell them, if something goes awry. We'd likely have to tell them about our contingency plans as well..."

"Of course." Madara preferred not to lie if possible, but he wouldn't divulge such terrible news without some sort of plan in the works. "At least tell me that you'll update me on the details of your plan when we're free of sensitive ears and prying eyes."

"I will." There was no getting around that. "I know better than to hide something from you." His father always found out anyway, even when Itachi was a kid.

Very good, he had taught his son well. "In that case..." Madara glances up as a well-dressed waiter silently approaches with their food, before slipping off again. "Tell me of this boy. I take it that you didn't come to care about him for his insufferable martyr streak."
"Everyone has their faults." Itachi sighs heavily. "You have cut the world's supply of hair care products in half and he has an idiotic martyr streak."

"Yes, but there must be more to him than that, otherwise you wouldn't go so far for him, soulmate or not." An Uchiha did not waste their time with someone unworthy of their attention, so Itachi must have seen something redeeming in the boy.

Itachi's lips twitch. "Well, he is a fantastic kisser." If only he could break that annoying martyr streak. Then they could share many more kisses.

Madara rolls his dark eyes, then regards his son with amusement. "I see. I suppose that indulging in what your partner has to offer would make you more positively inclined towards them. I suppose that I should leave that out when I inform his parents of his extra-curricular activities."

"He's done a lot of good for the world." Itachi shakes his head. "You know that as well as I do. His sarcasm amuses me and he does mix a very good drink."

Good drinks? That was interesting. "And clearly the fact that you enjoy his intimate company plays no role in your efforts to save him." Madara chuckles amusedly. "Are there any special considerations that I should speak to his parents about before they plan any sort of reunion?"

"Well, it would be a sorry soulmate bond indeed if there wasn't physical chemistry." His father would laugh him out of the chair, if he knew that he and Alex...Sasuke hadn't become lovers yet. "As for his parents, I don't know if he'll want to see them. He might become aggressive at the suggestion for various reasons. Some of which are altruistic."

Altruistic and suicidal, perhaps. "I doubt that they will take no for an answer, but I will caution them nonetheless. And if nothing else, it seems that your plan might teach him not to throw his life away so easily." Which was a fact that stuck hard in Madara's craw. "Is there anything that you require of me to make things more bearable?"

His father was trying. Itachi did appreciate the effort, but there was nothing that would make this bearable until it was all over and even then, he had no way of knowing how the story would end. "Unless you've got a time machine hidden somewhere, I don't think there's much that can be done." He sighs as he orders another glass of wine.

"Unfortunately, I do not." And though Madara had an inkling as to what Itachi would want with one, he felt compelled to ask and discover just what was going on in his son's head. "To what purpose?"

"Several." Itachi considers getting a third glass, but his father would never let him hear the end of it...if he did. "Though the only one I can speak of here is to prevent myself from ever taking this damn job."

That did not bode well. "I see." Then Madara would leave the unpleasantness here for now. "In that case, we will simply have to secure the foolish boy's life so that you can discipline him thoroughly. Have you any thoughts on where you wish to go after this case?" Because judging by his son's words, he doubted that the man would be working in this profession for very much longer.

"I don't really give a damn." Itachi shakes his head. "He can pick. As far as I'm concerned the Amazon rainforest or an uncharted island sounds perfect." Somewhere remote, untraceable, and where no one would ever be able to take his soulmate away from him.
Well, that was certainly telling. "I see, then I will consult with Shisui and begin making the appropriate arrangements for the two of you to relocate to somewhere safe." And that the proper identification documents were made.

Madara sighs and shakes his head as he sips at his own wine, still on his first glass. And it was going to stay that way, because clearly he would be the designated driver for the evening.

Tonight was supposed to be a quiet evening. Just him, some beer, some porn, and a few candid shots he'd sneaked of the most glorious breasts in the world. No thinking about work, no dealing with case files, and no dealing with higher ups who were pushing for sentencing before a case had even finished being put together.

No…tonight was some nice alone time for Jiraiya and his-

The phone rings and a deep groan exits from right down in his belly. "Not now…I was just getting to the good part!" He lets it ring once, twice, three times before growling and pausing the movie, snatching up the phone irritably. "Jiraiya."

Itachi barely refrains from rolling his eyes. He knew that tone of voice, but unfortunately things weren't about to get better for Jiraiya anytime soon. "I'll make this quick as I know you have 'important' things to do." The man was such a deviant. "As soon as Sasuke Uchiha's case is over, I am resigning from the agency. That should give you ample time to find a suitable replacement."

That murders Jiraiya's retort in an instant. "…Itachi, if this is about the case, I can have other agents take over." He wasn't cruel enough to force Itachi to work this case if he couldn't handle the emotional implications. Especially not if he was going to lose one of his best agents over it. "If you're feeling too much pressure, you could cash in on some of those vacation days you have saved up."

"The fact other agents will do the dirty work doesn't negate the fact we're punishing someone for killing child traffickers." No amount of vacation days would fix that either.

Ah…so that was it. "…You're resigning in protest because of ethical reasons." Well, Jiraiya could certainly understand the sentiment, and he didn't like it any more than Itachi did. Still, he'd seen the good that doing this work could bring, even if there were cases like this that could spoil the experience. "Is there nothing I can do to change your mind?" He really would rather not lose one of his best agents if he could help it. Itachi's talents were top tier, and they had closed several difficult cases thanks to him.

"It's not your fault." Itachi tries his best to cool his temper. "You're just playing by the rules of the book. Right now, I'm more inclined to burn the book than to write its pages." If it wasn't that he could help Sasuke's case, he would have already quit. "The only reason I'm sticking around as long as I am is because this case is my responsibility. After that, to hell with a job that locks up someone who prevents children from being sold into slavery."

If only it were that simple. Jiraiya knew the forces at play here, and there were some that would be difficult, if not impossible to sway. "Itachi, I know for a fact that there are figures lobbying over my head for the death penalty. He killed some very important people and stepped on even more toes. I'll warn you now that if you're hoping to get him off the death penalty, you'll need something short of a miracle."
"I'm aware of that." His voice was now more of a hiss than anything. "I'm also more than willing to destroy every last fucking one of their careers in the media" He didn't like deceiving Jiraiya, but there was no other choice. As soon as the case is over and I'm out of the job, don't think for a second I won't go straight to the press. Let them try to kill someone can read their minds." The fewer people who knew about their plan the better. So let Jiraiya think that Itachi was desperately trying to keep Sasuke off of death row instead of getting his soulmate on it.

Now that, Jiraiya definitely wouldn't mind. "I won't stop you from going to the press if that's what you want to do after you quit, in fact, I would encourage it." It's a good thing that his home line was secure, otherwise he'd never risk saying this. "I've got a few files that I've been hanging onto that you might find interesting. The more you can get him to spill before the trial, the better. And as long as you don't tell anyone, I'll give you authorization to use whatever methods short of letting him walk out of that cell that you think will help him cooperate. We can't let a vigilante do our jobs for us." The more they had to go on, the better. "Just keep it quiet, because there's a lot of pencil pushers who will make a racket about it if they find out."

Itachi was shocked that Jiraiya didn't try to reason with him. "Thank you." He wouldn't argue with it though. "I mean it. I'll be sure to do that." If nothing else, he'd put on a grand show the last time he walked into a court room. Well, short of potentially jury duty.

"Alright, I'll pay you a visit at your apartment and drop the files off first thing in the morning." He wasn't going to risk passing along information like that in the office. "You work on the kid and see how much he's willing to tell us. I'll work on entering that into plea for leniency." He'd also be bringing Sasuke's traumatic past and his age into account. "And the more sane and sympathetic you can make him seem to a jury, the better. We may not be the ones prosecuting or defending him, but they'll be calling their expert witnesses, so be ready for that."

"Got it." He nods at that information. "I'll do all that I can. He doesn't deserve this."

Jiraiya nods. "And that's the argument you'll have to make. But you won't be able to advocate directly on his behalf, or they'll strike you out as a witness because of conflict of interest." Which this most definitely was, but Jiraiya was choosing to ignore that for now. "If you can't at least sound neutral, you'll end up sabotaging your cousin's case instead of helping it. Can you do that, Agent Uchiha?"

That was a tough thing to ask of him. "I'll manage it because I have to." There was no other alternative.

"Good." Jiraiya reclines back in his chair, relaxing some as he brings up the files on a nearby tablet. "Then try to get your cousin to cooperate and tell us everything he can. Get him to write us a book or two if it helps." He was sure that the young man had a lot that he could say on a great many subjects, having spent so much time in the underbelly of society. "And if he knows anything beyond what you're already asking of him, get him to record that as well." And, if in the case that their appeals were not heard, Jiraiya could at least use the boy's information to finish what he started and root out some of the corruption still working against the justice system.

"Very well." He pauses for a moment. "Thank you again. I appreciate it more than you'll ever know, but it seems that I have a lot of work to do."

Jiraiya sighs, huffing out a tired laugh. "There is no rest for the wicked…" What did he do to deserve having this mess fall in his lap. "Just do what you have to do, Agent Uchiha. I'll get the files to your cousin, and you can work on your other cousin." These Uchihas were going to be the death of him, he was sure.
"I will." Itachi hangs up the call, preparing to move on his next task. There was not time to be sitting around when he had so much work to do.
Chapter 15
Chapter by celestia193

Shisui glances over the files again, prepared and delivered at five in the morning, courtesy of their boss. He could definitely see what Itachi was talking about regarding the deceptive conversation with Jiraiya. There was a lot of shit being hidden behind fancy parties and buried in money. And if Itachi felt like he had to bow out, then it was going to fall to Shisui to spearhead the uncovering of all this dirty laundry.

He glances at his cousin uncertainly, their plan for the day already laid out. "Are you sure that you're going to be okay going to see him?" Shisui had been watching Itachi, and honestly, his cousin’s emotions lately had been…dark to put it mildly.

"I have to for the case." Itachi gives him a look. "I'm not made of glass, Shisui."

The elder sighs, putting down the papers before him. "Even steel can bend and break. I just want to make sure that you're not going to cry, or scream at him. Or at our superiors..." Because Itachi would have every right to when he saw what they’d done.

"I'd say that the fact the building is still standing speaks wonders for my impulse control." Itachi smiles at him sweetly.

Yeah, Shisui was wondering just how long that was going to last, especially when Itachi saw the state of Sasuke right now. "Itachi, you should know that Sasuke isn't being held in one of the regular cells." Ever since the CIA had started taking on actual international law enforcement duties, they'd started keeping some cells in each of their office buildings, just in case. 'He's a shadow-walker and experienced killer, so the higher-ups have mandated that he be 'properly restrained.' I saw him yesterday before leaving and I barely stopped myself from storming into the head offices and tearing them a new one." It was better that Itachi prepare himself, rather than beginning to rage in the middle of their workplace.

"Of course." Itachi's eyes narrow. "Why would this agency ever do anything logical or within the realm of human decency?"

Shisui winces, especially since the memory of Sasuke locked in that place was still fresh. "I brought him some extra water yesterday, but I doubt he's been able to get any sleep. They’ve turned up the lights so that he can’t escape." It was bright and hot and utterly inhumane. "My advice for going in there...is to bring him water and a change of clothes. And be gentle with him."

"Noted. But while I’m gone, I want you to dig up the names of each and every one of the superiors responsible for this." He would end their careers and see them publicly humiliated. Jiraiya had likely saved him the trouble of even having to read their minds.

If Itachi wanted names, Shisui could definitely get him those. "Alright, I'll get on it. And good luck with Sasuke." Shisui wasn't sure if Itachi had reconciled his image of Alex with his image of Sasuke yet, but he hoped it would happen with the least amount of pain possible. The chances of that actually happening, though...were microscopic.

Itachi gives a nod of acknowledgement, frowning determinedly as he opens the front door and heads for the car. Perhaps he shouldn’t have expected Shisui to comfort him as he used to. Itachi was too old to be needing his older cousin’s reassurances. He couldn’t depend on Shisui forever.
He had to move past it, because now, Sasuke was the one depending on him.

Shisui sighs as the door to their apartment slams shut. This was nothing like the days when Itachi would get a grade he didn't like in a class where his teacher hated him because he was smarter than they were, or when Itachi handed in a paper and felt like it was less than perfect and stressed himself out over it, or when his powers manifest during his high school finals. Those were easy fixes. A good meal, some kind words, a few movies and a cousin cuddle, maybe with some good life advice thrown in. But they were past the age when those simple solutions would fix their problems. What was the standard protocol for dealing with a semi-suicidal soulmate who happened to be a prolific serial killer? Was there one? Because if there was, he sure as fuck didn't know it.

That left him with only one thing to do as he spins open his computer and sets up the screens at the kitchen island, choosing to work covertly from home today. "Alright...time to clean house." He cracks his knuckles and begins typing up a storm. It was time to start putting the real bad guys behind bars.

*linebreak*

As predicted, the state of the cell and its occupant made Itachi want to turn into the vigilante instead of Sasuke. His soulmate hadn't gotten any sleep and it was far too bright. Were it not for the kindness Shisui had shown him, Itachi was quite certain the other man would have already passed out.

"Sasuke." He moves closer, fighting back the impulse to destroy this wretched room they were in. "It's alright. It's me. Itachi."

"Itachi...?" Sasuke tilts his head slightly, angling himself so that he can hear Itachi a little better, a few drops of sweat trickling down the side of his face. "What...are you doing here?"

"I'm still one of the agents working on your case." He sighs. "That and no matter how angry I am with your decision, I'm not cruel enough to leave you suffer completely alone." There was still the plan to consider, but Sasuke didn't know that. "Maybe one day I'll be able to forgive you for abandoning me and you'll forgive me for everything else."

Forgiveness would be nice, but Sasuke wasn't going to demand it. "Itachi there's nothing you could do that you would need my forgiveness for."

Itachi wasn't so sure that Sasuke would be saying same thing if they did manage to save him. "I suppose we'll see." He sighs. "I can at least dim lights for you." And at his touch, the light control panel accepts the command. He'd already manipulated the light settings in the camera's interface. No one would be the wiser now.

Sasuke inhales deeply and sighs as the lights dim to half their original strength. It was still well-lit in here, but at least it didn't feel like he was staring at the sun through this thin blindfold. In fact, the blindfold was downright useless, and he didn't know why they even bothered with it. For show, maybe? "Thanks..." Then, he smiles wryly and gives a hollow laugh. "Now, if you could put the temperature down about twenty degrees and get me enough snow to make a fort, that would be perfect." He was Canadian. Thirty-five degrees Celsius was not a comfortable temperature for him.

Itachi sighs and turns the ventilation system's cold setting up as much as he could get away with to offset the heat produced by the lights. "If you had listened to me, you wouldn't be sweating to death." It was as simple as that.

And Sasuke would choose not to address that accusation. Itachi wasn't wrong, and he knew it, but
he was tired of defending his decision to people who wouldn't accept it. "How did you find me, anyway? I know that you can read minds and everything, but I was careful to cloak those thoughts when you were around. And if you'd known it was me in the bar, you would have arrested me right there instead of finding out about Orochimaru."

The agent sighs quietly. "I can sometimes read a person's residual memory." Itachi smiles at him. "Even if it's an old one, if the emotional intensity was high enough, it's possible."

Sasuke rolls that admission over in his head, quietly debating when Itachi could have read his memories. His emotional intensity usually wasn't that high when he was around Itachi, and certainly not that murderous. The only times that happened was when he was killing someone. Like Orochimaru, or... "Danzo..." Could he have picked up the residual memory imprint from when he killed Danzo? Like a spirit leaving behind a spiritual handprint?

Itachi nods in confirmation. "We visited the crime scene for Danzo and later on, Orochimaru." It hadn't taken long to realize what had happened from there.

"Yeah, I saw you there." And Sasuke had wondered if the two shadowed figures were a couple of Orochimaru's assistants, like Kabuto. So, he'd gone after them, intent on dispatching them as well. His greatest shock came when he was face to face with them, and recognized friend, rather than foe. At least...so he'd thought. Now it was just complicated. "I hadn't expected to run into a couple of CIA agents."

"Yes, I imagine not." Itachi didn't know what to say. "We can at least try to get you off death row." Even if the point was to see him on it.

Sasuke tilts his head slightly, both intrigued and saddened by Itachi's words. "And how do you figure that?" He'd done more than enough to deserve it. But it seemed that Itachi was still going to give the fight his best shot.

"I know you don't know much about our family, but believe me we have friends in high places." The man hadn't seen what his father could do yet, or what they were conspiring and arranging to do. "So it's doable."

"Ah...I see." Sasuke chuckles softly. "Yeah...I don't think that your father likes me very much. He came in earlier while you were busy working. He's...quite opinionated. He had a lot to say about my situation." And about Sasuke's attitude.

"Well, I imagine that probably has more to do with him not understanding the situation completely than anything else." Itachi smiles sheepishly. Not that he could entirely blame his father for reacting badly, considering Sasuke's bad decision-making.

"Maybe." Sasuke felt like Madara understood more than Itachi thought, and that's why the man was so upset. If his and Itachi's positions were reversed, he might feel the same things that Itachi was feeling right now. "So, what brought you to my little hellhole? I doubt it was just for the small talk."

"Sasuke, don't provoke me." Itachi was barely maintaining even the illusion of some self-control and his soulmate was testing even that now. "As much as I loathe to do it, I still have a job to do. Best to get the questioning over with while you have a pair of sympathetic ears listening."

Right...there was that. "Alright, Agent." Sasuke leans back against the wall, his head slumping to the side. "What do you want to know? What do you need to know to make sense of everything I've done?"
He didn't want to do this. Itachi would have given almost anything to walk out that door with Sasuke right now, but he had a job to do and if he didn't, someone else would. "We'll start with the basics." He sighs. "How did you choose your victims and where on earth did you get your information that allowed you to kill them with such ease?" There was also another thing that needed addressed. "Was there any particular reason why the women were treated more gently as a whole than the men?"

Sasuke smirks, repressing an amused laugh. "Blurtting everything out at once, are we?" He sighs, thinking on back of some of his kills. "Then I suppose we start with those basics you like so much. I'm not fond of hurting women. I'm not attracted to them, but that doesn't mean I wish them any particular ill." If he did, he wouldn't have looked after as many drunk coeds as he had. "The men were all assholes. They think that just because they hold power over their victims, that they can do whatever they want to them, no matter how…depraved. They deserved everything they got from me." And he would NEVER apologize for hurting them. "Though…I suppose that you want to know why…how I know that they deserve every bad thing they got and more."

Sasuke's eyes glow red behind the blindfold, remembering the first time he went on a spirit walk. The ghosts gravitated towards him, drawn by his sadness, his loneliness, his anger, and his bitterness. "Well, I am an Uchiha, after all. I have psychic powers of my own. They give me access to witnesses of crimes that the police never even think to talk to. Witnesses and victims who have no rights under human law."

"So that's it." He wasn't talking to people, not living ones anyway. "Ghosts. They were the ones who were giving you a list. That's why there is no real rhyme or reason to your attack patterns."

He nods slowly. "Yes. They come to me with their revenge. I'm the only one who listens to them. Most of them find me when I'm on a spirit walk. But some of them find me in the streets, sometimes while I'm out on a hunt. Some travel dozens, even hundreds of kilometers from their resting places in order to ask favors of revenge from me." Sasuke's red eyes glow a little brighter. "I'm the only spirit medium who listens to their pleas for justice, and who has the abilities needed to get wherever in the world I need to go in order to carry them out."

The more he spoke, the more Itachi wished that he had found Sasuke years ago. None of this should have ever happened. His soulmate never should have been made to go through so much pain. "You were helping those who couldn't help themselves." That was something. "We can work that angle and build more sympathy for your case." The fact he was so young and attractive didn't hurt either. "Is there anything else that I need to know for the investigation?" The memories welling up in Sasuke were disturbing, to say the least. And extremely loud. He didn't want to see them, but obviously there was more that needed hearing.

Sasuke becomes quiet, considering the question. "…Gato was personal. He killed one of the other two survivors of that round of experiments, Haku. He was…my friend so I got a little more violent than usual. Danzo was personal as well, he's the one who sold me to Orochimaru. I was always told that my birth parents sold me to Danzo. Your father said otherwise, but…" In the end, the truth wouldn't change anything. He'd still been sold to Orochimaru. "There's a huge black market slave trade in supernaturals. Danzo was one of the ringleaders, and Orochimaru one of the biggest buyers, but there are more of them out there. I killed off a few of them, but they're in the minority of my victims. If my case does anything, I want it to shed light on the trafficking of supernatural children, and I want the network taken down."

That could certainly be done. Itachi would take great pleasure in spreading that information around to the media and law enforcement agencies. "Well, I should like for you to record anything you know about the trade or if they allow it, you can write it down." Such information would help to
save other children from sharing Sasuke's fate. A fate that Itachi was determined to change.

"I could write entire books on it, if you want me to." After all, Sasuke was the one who listened to the stories of every other child that died in that place. He knew who'd sold them, when, where, how they'd been kidnapped or traded...some of them really had been sold by their families, families who were trying to escape poverty. So it hadn't been too difficult, after a time, to believe that his parents had sold him as well. "...Did my parents really sell me to that man?" He had to know. Madara had said they hadn't, but Sasuke didn't know him, didn't trust him. Itachi, though... Itachi was a different story.

Maybe it would help him. If nothing else, Sasuke did deserve to know the truth about Fugaku and Mikoto. "They were devastated by your 'death.'" Itachi takes a deep breath and sighs. "They wouldn't have sold you. No one is that good of an actor."

Sasuke nods slowly. "I see." That sounded more like the vague memories he held of them than the stories Orochimaru told him about how he'd been sold off for a small fortune. It wasn't as though he'd ever starved as a kid. His parents were never hurting for money. "Then I guess they'll be disappointed with me when they find out what I've done." Not that he cared much whether they approved or not. It had been a long time since he felt any real attachment to them, and the one he'd had was spoiled by Orochimaru's lies. That kind of indifference wouldn't disappear overnight, and Sasuke knew that very well.

"Sasuke, you suffered severe trauma." He shakes his head. "If anything, they'll blame themselves for what happened to you and what you did."

"I made my choices." And Sasuke refused to blame people who didn't do anything for the decisions he made on his own. Killing was one of them. "There are some things I couldn't have changed and I know that. But I'm the one who made the conscious decision to become a reaper, an angel of vengeance. No one forced me to do that. I could have left it all behind, but I chose not to."

While Itachi understood that Sasuke felt the need for vengeance, to cleanse this world of those who put him and other children through untold horrors, Sasuke's choices were coming back to haunt all of them. "I wish you hadn't given up on your life so easily."

For the first time since landing in this cell, Sasuke smiles ruefully at Itachi. "And I wish that we could have played house a little longer. But I never realized just how entrenched you were in my mess until it was too late. If I'd known...I would have made sure that you never saw my face that night." It was that one mistake in identification that fucked everything up. As long as Itachi didn't know, Sasuke could have kept pretending, kept hiding. But once it was out, he knew that he could never ask Itachi to look at him the same way again.

"And now we're all part of this mess." And while Itachi loved this foolish, idiotic man before him, he resented him for putting him in this situation. In a situation where he would have to plot Sasuke's murder in order to save his beloved's life. But when they did, they were going to have words with each other, and Itachi wasn't going to let him off the hook so easily.

Yes, now they had all been dragged into his infernal mess."...I'm sorry." Sasuke hangs his head, his head throbbing and eyes beginning to ache. "...Itachi?" He had no right to ask for help now, but maybe a little more mercy wasn't out of the question.

"Yes, Sasuke?" Itachi glances at him, not sure what the other man wanted to say. What was left, now that Sasuke had given up?

He felt silly asking, but Sasuke felt like he had to. "Could you...sit with me for a little while and
play with my hair?” It sounded so childish, likely because the person who used to do that was his mother. And Temari, for a time when the nightmares would come. “It…helps me fall asleep. I haven't been able to sleep for a couple of days now.”

Itachi nods and sits with him, his back presses to the wall as he removes Sasuke's blindfold and lays his foolish soulmate's head in his lap. "It seems the least I can do." He sighs as he begins playing with the soft and sweat-soaked raven locks. "You decide so much, and ask for so little." All Sasuke wanted was some comfort, to be able to sleep in a place causing him so much anxiety that Itachi could feel it ebbing from him in waves. He needed someone to lean on. Itachi needed to be that someone, even if Sasuke was nearly incapable of asking for help.

"I'm used to doing things alone…” Sasuke sighs, enjoying the gentle touch. "I don't like dragging people down with me, especially when I make mistakes…”

"We all make mistakes, Sasuke." He shakes his head as he slowly glides his fingers through those silken, spiky strands. "Mine was obviously taking this job in the first place." And letting Sasuke turn himself in to them at all.

Sasuke shakes his head tiredly, pressing back against Itachi's fingers. "No, you're a good agent. This was just…fate. We are supposed to be enemies, after all." Right…enemies… And this enemy was nothing short of a balm on Sasuke's soul. "Thank you…” He takes a deep breath, his conscious mind drifting away, despite the profusion of uncomfortable heat and light. Itachi was all the warmth and light he needed.

"Being a good agent feels like more of an insult than anything else at the moment, but I know what you meant.” Another sigh escapes his lips as he continues playing with Sasuke's hair. "Try to get some sleep. I can't imagine that it's easy in this place, but you're going to need it." "Mmm…” Sasuke's head shifts in Itachi’s lap, pressing closed eyes against dark pants to further block out the light. His breathing slowly evens out as his mind mercifully shuts itself off after far too long awake in this place.

Despite Itachi’s anger, Sasuke looked so peaceful, so content being doted on like this. So soft and sweet when he wanted to be, and so innocent, scared, and inexperienced when it came to intimacy. It was hard to reconcile this picture of him with the ruthless killer they saw that night, whose eyes glowed red as he left bodies strewn all about that snake's den.
Chapter 16

Chapter by celestia193

Gaara was once again bartending. He didn't have the faintest clue where Sasuke was, but he hoped the sullen youth was with Itachi. Then perhaps, Sasuke's sexy soulmate would pull off a miracle that would qualify him for sainthood. He would somehow remove the stick that was still seemingly lodged up Sasuke's hindquarters. A Herculean feat indeed.

The night was still young, the club full of humans and supernaturals alike, and tonight, one brave fairy cautiously approaches the bar where the vampire stood, intrigued and enchanted by the bright hair and brighter eyes of the immortal hailing from the Emerald Isle. Soft lavender eyes focus on him as matching wings flutter anxiously. "H-hello there." She tries to keep her friendly, professional composure, hoping that it will help to calm her nerves. It wasn't often that she approached a vampire.

"Hello," He smiles subtly at her. "What can I get you?" He was trying his best not to reveal his fangs. The fairy had been coming to the club somewhat regularly and likely already knew he was a vampire, but showing his teeth probably would have frightened her half to death all the same.

Hinata felt like her face might catch fire, but she had to be bold. Bold! She was not a hundred year old youngling anymore, she was a proud two hundred and fifty, and she was going to prove it!

"Ah…two Slippery Nipples, please." If that didn't work, she'd just ask for a Sex on the Beach. Assuming her face stopped burning and she could get the courage to say anything more after THOSE words slipped out of her mouth.

He chuckles as he begins pouring the drinks for her. "Yes, two is a wise decision on your part." The fact she even knew what that was surprised him, she'd always struck him as rather innocent. "Nipples should always come in pairs in my opinion. I do hope you like it." Of course, many used Sex on the Beach for a pickup line, but this one was less common. "Are you from Ireland originally?"

Hinata's blush deepens a little as she takes the first creamy shot in her fingers. "Most of the family is, yes. We mixed with some snow fairies from Japan a long time ago, though." So the names and looks stuck. "I'm from Dublin, originally."

"That sounds exotic." Snow fairies, that was an enchanting image. "Originally, I'm from some Irish village whose name is all but lost to history. Too small to even be plotted on a map back then." He chuckles. "I can't say I have any snow fairy in my blood."

Well, that sort of answered the question as to whether or not he was older than her. That was good, the older vampires usually had more control over their urges, so she would be relatively safe. She swirls the first shot lightly, giving it first a slight sprinkle of fairy dust, then downs it in one and places the shot glass upside down on a napkin on the bar. "I-I'm sure that it was a lovely v-village. Cities aren't all they're c-cracked up to be, believe me." She could feel the drink warming her throat as it went down. It would take a few minutes before it started kicking in, but she'd have her liquid courage soon enough.

"These days, most probably would consider it charming." He watches as she drinks. "Back then, well I was like most men my age. I wanted to explore." He'd had some silly notions about how fascinating large cities were and they were, but there were also drawbacks to them. "I've lived in
both as most people do eventually. Small places and large ones like here.

"Y-yes, as have I." She nods with a small smile on her face. "Father sent me here to oversee our family jewelry business. I've lived here for a few decades now." Though exploring was never really her strong suit. "You like exploring, then? W-where have you gone?"

That did make sense. "Well, that seems a sensible decision on his part." Gaara smiles. "Who better to run your jewelry business than one's own daughter with eyes like pearls." Her last question was well, it would take forever to answer. "It would be easier to list all the places I haven't lived than the ones I have. Though I've stayed here longer than most of the others and I like it well enough." He didn't see a particular reason to leave and there were more than a few reasons to stay.

"O-oh, I s-see. You m-must be very well t-traveled, then." She had never been told that she had eyes like pearls before. Of course, she didn't often stick around her father's party guests long enough for them to compliment her. She wasn't very fond of large crowds with many young heirs looking to marry an heiress, even if she matched none of them. It was mortifying, but she found herself far more interested in the Irish vampire who ran his own club and tended his own bar than in the sons of high society.

"You could say that." He smiles at her, still trying to hide his fangs or at least minimize them. "What about yourself?"

"Europe, for the most part." She prepares her second shot, starting to feel the relaxing buzz of the first. "Father insisted that I become cultured, so I spent time in France, Italy, England." She swirls the shot and downs it, placing the second glass next to its twin. "I was to understand the fashions, the trends, what sorts of jewels were desirable, fashionable, popular." And she was very good at it. "But I prefer the part of the job where the customer's face lights up because they've just found the perfect piece for their perfect someone. It's...beautiful..." The number of times she'd had people coming in to buy something for their soulmate was...very difficult to remember.

She was such a kind fairy. "As you probably figured out, I'm Gaara." Aka the vampire she should be running away from screaming. "That does sound like a very nice part of a job to have, Hinata." He had heard her name once or twice. He wasn't stalking her. So he told himself anyway.

He knew her name? Hinata flushes a deep scarlet, the alcohol warming her veins now as much as her throat. And the taste of Irish cream lingered on her lips. An idle part of her mind wondered if he might taste like Irish cream. She would berate herself for such deviant thoughts later. "Yes, I do like my job very much. And...it's n-nice to meet you, Gaara."

She was such a sweet little thing. So shy for a fairy. Fragile almost in the way beautiful china was. Unfortunately, he was the metaphorical bull in said china shop.

"You're welcome." He refills her drink idly. "So how high of a tolerance do you have?" That's when he notices her hand and his eyes widen for a fraction of a second. Only centuries of hiding his emotions let his mask fall into place easily. That...shouldn't be possible.

"I'm a fairy, so much higher than a human." Though not as high as a vampire, she was pretty sure. She sprinkles her dust and downs the third shot, the liquid courage turning to fire, and emboldening her to lift herself up and sit on the bar top. "S-so I noticed that Alex hasn't been here the last couple of night, which means...you're stuck at the bar." She swallows nervously, excitedly, her heart pounding furiously. "So you must be hungry..." He smiles at her. "Don't worry." Those days were behind him. "I'm not going to turn all my patrons into my own personal blood fountain." Maybe, she was just scared of him turning into a ripper.
Was that why the fairy had talked to him?

"Ah, no, that's not what I meant!" She waves her hands, trying to head him off. She didn't want to offend the sexy, considerate vampire. What if he never talked to her again!? "I just…since he's not here, you can't leave the bar to find someone to feed on, so I thought you might want to…” Hinata bites her lip, her hands twitching towards the zipper of her jacket. "I thought you might like it if I offered…"

Was it wrong that he wanted to feel this vampire's lips on her skin? Probably, but she was finding that she cared less and less. She pulls down the zipper of her jacket, the purple and black sliding apart to reveal a soft black halter top inside, tied around her neck was a matching ribbon. "I've…seen you looking at me, so I thought maybe you liked me too, and…” She slides her arms out of her sleeves, letting the jacket pool around her waist, as she slides her legs over onto the other side of the bar.

"I didn't think that I was being that obvious." Gaara mentally berates himself for getting caught gawking like some school boy. "I do like you, but I didn't want my fangs to scare you." Most fairies were terrified of vampires for good reason. "I'd be lying, if I said that I didn't want to though." What vampire in their right mind would turn down fairy blood, especially when such a beautiful fairy was offering it?

Hinata's expression softens, his words relaxing her nerves. She felt better knowing that she wasn't the only one trying to figure out how to deal with this. "I watched you with Tenten, so I know how nice you can be. I've…been watching you since my first time here. You're polite and honest…and you're good to the people you ask for feeding. And I see the way you dote on Alex, it's like he's your brother, or your son. Your fangs don't scare me because I know that you're kind. So if you want to…” She tilts her head to the side, brushing her long midnight blue hair away from her neck. "I don't mind. I…I'd like it if you'd try…” Plus, she'd always wondered if it was as pleasurable to be bitten by a vampire as people said. And if she was going to be bitten, she wanted it to be him.

She was so shy and Gaara didn't see any bite marks on her neck. "Well, I do have some private rooms in the back. If that's easier on you?” It was almost certainly her first time being bitten and it was hard to tell how the fairy would react to it. A private room might be better. It was the gentlemanly thing to do. So he tries to tell himself anyway. he wasn't trying to whisk her into the back for the usual reason men did that with the women on their arm.

Hinata's eyes widen, then she considers the matter and nods. "Okay." A private room was fine. At least then there would be less people staring at her for throwing herself at the vampire. She slides down off the bar and lands behind it with barely a sound. "A private room sounds nice."

"Alright." He just needed to find someone to mind the bar. "Kankuro!" His brother would do. "I'm going to get a drink. Think you can handle the front for awhile?" His brother had just walked into the club, which was rather fortunate timing.

The painted vampire's face falls, then he rolls he eyes, slapping his face with his palm. "You have got to be kidding me." He was here to visit his siblings, not play bartender at his brother's club. Then again… His eyes drift over the fairy standing next to him, looking purposeful and slightly disheveled. "Fine!" That was the one he'd talked about, the fairy with the glittering lavender wings. Still, he mumbles irritably as he makes his own way behind the bar. "You so owe me for this, Gaara."

"Add it to my tab." Gaara shrugs gracefully as he leads Hinata to the backrooms. "We do have different themes or would you prefer to stick to a traditional one for now?"
"Whichever one you like best. But traditional is fine if you don't want to show me…" After all, they hadn't really gotten to know each other very well yet, so she didn't expect him to share too much this quickly.

"Oh I'm more than willing to show you whatever interests you." He smiles. "We've probably got over a dozen themes."

"Okay…” Hinata shifts slightly in her heeled boots, biting her lip for a moment, before leaning in towards Gaara's ear. "Do you have any rooms with a lot of leather?"

"Hinata, I'm a vampire and this is a nightclub." He chuckles at her request, finding it adorable. "Of course, I do." He smiles and takes her hand in his own, leading her to a room marked 327 on the door.

When the door swings open, Hinata's eyes widen to see a room decorated with black leather couches, a comfortable-looking red and black bed, and off to one side, a small stage was built into the wall, with a metal pole extending to the ceiling. "Wow…” It was…perfect!

"Is it a bit much?" He tilts his head at her. "We can always go to another room, if you prefer." The pole in particular might have been a bridge too far for the sweet fairy.

"No…” She mumbles quietly as she reaches out to the pole, gliding her fingers along the cool, smooth metal, before hoisting herself up onto the stage and twirling around it. It reminded her of the studios in Russia where she learned to dance. And not the kind of dancing her father would ever approve of.

Mesmerized by the air of the room, she lets her jacket fall to the floor, along with the slightly longer, fluttery skirt, keeping the leather miniskirt beneath as she wraps a leg around the pole and gives a practiced spin.

Gaara's eyes almost pop out of his head from the sight. "Wow." He never expected her to go right for it or at all really. Though somehow the fairy made a normally 'sleazy' action look enchanting.

She hoists herself further up the pole, spinning around it and lifting her legs parallel with the floor. As she swings around and hooks them both around the smooth metal, she flushes and stares down at Gaara. "Um…could we keep this between us? I don't think my father would like it much if he knew I practiced pole-dancing."

"Yeah." He nods dumbly. "I don't know your father anyway and I'm not in a hurry to get staked for watching you display your...exotic dancing skills. Which are exceptional." Very much so actually.

Hinata's eyes light up with excitement. "Good." She twists until she felt herself hanging upside down, hair trailing down to the floor as she spread her arms out wide as through flying, her wings fluttering behind her. "Now…come here and take me down." She adds a new sharpness to her voice as her confidence begins to rise. "And be gentle with my wings."

"Of course." Gaara swiftly makes his way over to her and slowly lowers the fairy off of the pole. "They're beautiful." He felt like such a child for stating the obvious, but it was true. They also looked fragile, but they couldn't have been nearly as fragile as they appeared or else they would have been shredded a long time ago. Still, he handles those with extra care.

"Thank you." Smiling, Hinata waits until her feet touch the ground before pushing the vampire back into one of the leather couches. "Right…now where were we?" She brushes her hair back over her shoulder as she presses him into the couch and sits down, straddling his lap. "I'm sorry for
earlier, I get a little shy around crowds."

The transformation was pretty stunning. Though who was he to argue if she wanted to be bolder in private. Most people were. "You're welcome." He smiles at her and then almost gasps when he's suddenly pressed into the couch. "That's alright. A lot of people get that way."

Though he’d never seen someone flip a switch this fast before, he wasn’t going to complain. She laughs softly. "You’d think at my age, I'd have completely grown out of it, but I'm mostly there now. I just don't like the judging that comes with others' eyes." He seemed to be responding very well, so she hesitantly ventures on, pressing a kiss to Gaara's lips, hoping that the older immortal would respond.

Respond, he did. He liked to think that he was well, at least somewhat of a gentleman in some respects. Though it was hard to worry about Calgary when you had a sexy fairy straddling your waist and her lips that were so incredibly soft. So he wastes no time when it comes to plundering her sweet mouth with his own lips and his tongue.

Hinata hums contentedly as she presses Gaara further into the couch, trapping him there as much as a fairy could trap a vampire. Practice clearly made perfect, because he was an excellent kisser. She hadn't expected a vampire to taste like strawberries. She wraps her tongue around his, enjoying the taste for a couple of minutes, before finally pulling back. "That's a good start." Maybe they could have some more fun later.

For now, she wraps his hands around her lower back. VERY low on her back. And she wraps hers around his neck as she bares her own for him. "Are you hungry now?"

"Starving." Practically salivating actually. "Tell me if it hurts and I'll stop." Somehow. God only knew how though. "I promise." With that being said he glides his tongue along her virgin neck slowly before pressing his lips to it and finally sinking his fangs into the soft skin he finds there.

Hinata gasps as the fangs pierce her neck, though the spiky red hair tickles, and the tongue along her skin soothes the ache. That ache. Not the one slowly building elsewhere. "Yes…" She moans softly as she slides forward a little, letting his hands slip a little lower and not complaining one bit about it.

She tasted incredible. Whether it was because she was a fairy or just because Hinata was Hinata, Gaara didn't know. Though he gladly continues drinking from her. She was the best thing he had ever tasted in her life and he couldn't resist pressing their bodies further together. She was so wonderfully warm and soft.

Exhaling a pleased sigh, Hinata's fingers curl into the fabric at his shoulders, and she rolls her hips up and down Gaara's lap, a new heat igniting in her blood. "Gaara." Her voice was reduced to a breathless whisper in his ear.

He reluctantly pulls away from her neck to speak. "Yes?" He knew he probably presented a frightening image with her blood staining his teeth, but there was no mistaking what kind of desire was interlaced with his voice now.

Hinata stops moving, her eyes trailing down to Gaara's arms, where long sleeves covered his pale skin. "I just…want to know." She slides up both sleeves, first setting her eyes on an unfamiliar tattoo, then on the stylized tattoo of the third eye adorning his arm in a rainbow of shimmering colors. Just like hers. "I knew it…there was just something about you that I couldn't ignore…"

It was dangerous for a fairy to be bonded to a vampire for obvious reasons. Gaara half wanted to
tell her to run. The other half of him wanted her to stay just where she was. "I feel the same way."
It was the second half that won out though. "Does that make me selfish knowing what sort of risk
this might pose to you?"

"No." Hinata shakes her head. "It means you're still partly human after all." She smiles and kisses
him, not minding the taste of her own blood on his lips and fangs. "And it means..." She pushes
him down so that his back lays flat against the couch. "That I don't have to treat you like a
porcelain doll." She runs her heeled boot up his thigh, smiling mischievously as befits a fairy.

He kisses back and groans. "Good to know." Gaara immediately flips them and deepens the kiss.
"God, you're beautiful." He slowly reaches for her wings. Ready to retract his hand, if she
protested. He couldn't deny his curiosity though.

Then the door bangs open, and blonde pigtails bounce through the air as dark green eyes flash with
panic and anger. "Gaara! Sasuke's been arrested by the CIA!"

Never before had Gaara's mood ever changed that quickly. "What?!" Temari had to be joking.
Though disappointed by the intrusion, Hinata could tell that this was likely a very serious situation,
especially if an organization like the CIA was involved. "I...can come back later if you'd prefer.
Or..." She sits up, grabbing a piece of paper and pen from her jacket pocket and scribbling down
some numbers on it. "Here, I'll leave you my number." She smiles softly and climbs off of Gaara's
lap. "Call me, okay?"

"Of course." He blinks as he takes the number. "You still want me to call even though you heard
that?" Hinata knew enough to realize he was potentially connected to a CIA investigation, even
indirectly. Why wasn't she running?

Hinata rolls her eyes, an uncharacteristic, but not completely unheard of reaction from her. "I'm two
hundred and fifty years old. I wouldn't deserve to brag about that if I balked at the involvement of
federal agencies in people's lives. I've seen people locked up who don't deserve it, and people set
free who shouldn't be allowed to live." She knew very well that organizations like the CIA could
often put their noses in places that they didn't belong. "Besides, it sounds like your friend needs
your help. We can talk about this later." She pecks him on the lips, smiling softly. "Okay?"

He returns the affectionate gesture and smiles. "Yes, later. I promise that I'll make it up to you." He
beams at her.

"Alright." She reaches to the floor for her jacket, sliding it back over her shoulders and zipping it
up. "I'll see you later, Gaara." She smiles sweetly as she passes Temari in the doorway. "I hope
your friend is okay."

Temari nods, watching silently as the pretty fairy drifts out of the room and back down the
hallway. "...Well, I'm sure that Sasuke will be glad to know that you made a move on that fairy of
yours while he was gone." And speaking of Sasuke... "It turns out that those two from the bar,
Itachi and Shisui, were CIA agents here to catch Sasuke. They know how many people he's killed."

"Damn it!" If Gaara's heart could still beat, he would have had a heart attack. "I warned him to
stop, but he just wouldn't listen! He had to go and throw it all away."

The blonde vampire sighs, shaking her head. "It seems like it all went fine until he saw Shisui and
Itachi. When he came face to face with Itachi, he just...surrendered. He led them right back here,
right to him, and he gave up without a fight." The last of his fighting spirit had been used against
Orochimaru, and now there was nothing left keeping him going. She'd watched that descent into
darkness firsthand, and she was pretty sure she was right.
"That doesn't help." Gaara hisses wondering why she thought that was relevant. "I don't care how or why he gave up, I care that it will take a miracle to save his ass." He had contacts in the legal community. "With the amount of blood on his hands, even I will have a hard time getting him off the death penalty."

"Which is why we won't." Temari holds up her phone, still a little surprised at the voice that had come through only minutes ago. "We're not going to get Sasuke off. Shisui and Itachi have a plan, and it means that Sasuke has to die." Well, not exactly. "Temporarily."

"That last part is an important disclaimer." Gaara's eyes narrow at her, not entirely sure he liked wherever this was going. "I don't get how becoming a vampire will help him in this case, unless you wish to say it was his bloodlust that made him do it." The Ripper Defense was becoming more effective, but Sasuke hadn't been a vampire at the time of his crimes.

"No, apparently the agent wants to turn this into a soap opera." And while Temari could see the merit in it, it had to be pulled off perfectly, otherwise everything was going to go sideways. "They want to go ahead with the execution, but instead use a magic potion to turn Sasuke into Juliet and fake his death for a couple of hours. They're planning on turning it into a gas and substituting the nitrogen for it. That way, the medical examiner will declare him dead, the case will be over, and then he wants us to come get Sasuke after he's woken up."

"That's the craziest thing that I have ever heard in my life!" Which was saying something because Gaara was hundreds of years old.

"Yes, and Shisui hung up before I could tell him so." Which greatly irritated Temari, because now she felt like she had no control over whether her friend lived or died. "His master plan is essentially to have Sasuke die, and then take up a new identity, like he's been doing here. Except that his 'death' will be officially witnessed, and the case against him closed."

"I guess there is merit to it." Gaara still didn't like it. "The risk is so high though. One wrong move and it won't be a temporary death."

Which was one of Temari's concerns. "That's why he's getting a witch involved. The potion is going to be on a timer. He's also going to use the information that Sasuke is providing to push for nitrogen asphyxiation as method of execution since it's 'gentler' than other methods." The degree to which Shisui had plotted out killing his cousin was alarming, and...almost hot.

"Temari, you're disturbing." Gaara blinks at his sister. "Do you actually find this erotic?"

She shrugs, completely unabashed. "What? He plans out how to murder people with a precision even Sasuke doesn't have." How was she supposed to not find that hot?

"..." Gaara shakes his head and suddenly has an urge to warn Shikamaru about how truly demented his sister was.

Temari laughs at her brother's expression, but the laughter dies when returning to the task at hand. "Shisui called me to ask if I could make sure that no one recognizes Sasuke as the killer now being held by the CIA once they fake his death and get him out of there." Disguising him was, of course, a necessity, but she did feel that Shisui made the right call in asking her to do it. She'd been hiding Sasuke under everyone's noses for years. She could do it again. And this time... "I guess now I can get out the bleach and piercing needles." If Sasuke was ever going to let her have some real fun, this would be the best opportunity.

"Do you want to be staked?" Because that's what it sounded like. "He'll never let you do either, especially the blonde."
"I didn't say blond, I said bleach." Trust her little brother not to know the applications. "His hair is too dark to take anything other than temporary color. I'd need to bleach it to put anything permanent in." And on the other point. "Besides, he's not that opposed to piercings, he was almost willing to let me do his ears before he left." If she'd had just a couple more minutes, she was positive that she could have convinced him to let her do it right then and there. "And now's the best time to do that, it'll help with his cover, he'll see that." Hm…rubies would look good there…maybe with silver settings. And he definitely needed more electric blue streaks. If she could convince him to let her play with colors a bit more, she could crop the underside and dye it dark blue.

His sister belonged in a mental institution. She actually thought this was fun on some level. Did she truly not realize how serious this was? "Very well then." He sighs. "What shall I be doing during this crazy venture?"

Temari snaps out of her daydreams, eyes turning serious once more. "You're on pickup. You have to smuggle him across the border and back here without anyone figuring out that he's alive, or that his 'body' has been moved anywhere other than the family estate. And you definitely can't connect yourself to him, otherwise someone might end up suspecting us of hiding him if things go sideways." Secrecy was the top priority here.

That much he could handle. It was probably the least insane thing about this entire undertaking actually. Gaara nods his consent. Honestly, why hadn't Sasuke just listened to him in the first place? It would have made things so much easier. "Understood." He nods as he slowly begins to calm down. "Anything else?"

"Hm…" Temari taps her foot, thinking hard. "Actually, yes." Her grin widens across her face. "Tell Sasuke when you see him that I'm going to throttle him, then he's going to spend several hours locked in my room. That should get him used to the idea before I snatch him up." There was nothing worse than dealing with a client who had no idea what to expect.

That much he would do with great glee. "Very well then." Gaara nods.

Temari smirks, feeling a cruel satisfaction at this turn of events. "Then we should start preparing to bring our little shadow-walker home. Itachi's father is handling the documents, so all that's left is the trial." But she knew well that dealing with courts were always the longest part.

While Madara had never been on the best of terms with his younger cousin, he wasn't entirely sure if he was bringing Fugaku and his wife good news or bad news. Whatever the case, they were certainly going to be confused, and while his short fuse with his nephews had done nothing to foster closer bonds with them, this was not something to be kept as secret as Shisui would have it.

Therefore, he sits in his home office and brings up a video screen to make a call halfway around the world to his foolish cousin who, even fourteen years later, mourned the death of his not-so-dead son. This was a situation that called for tact, patience, and in-depth explanation.

…None of which Madara found himself to be very good at, but his skills would suffice. His tanned fingers tap on the airborne keyboard, commanding the interface to place a call to Okinawa, to Fugaku and Mikoto Uchiha.

Fortunately for him, it was Mikoto who answers the call first. "Hello?" Of course, she had no idea who had just called. The number wasn't familiar to her. Hopefully, it wasn't a telemarketer. "Ah, Mikoto, I was expecting Fugaku. It's Madara." Nevertheless, Mikoto would do just fine.
Madara was simply hoping to have a calm conversation prior to diving into the storm of emotions that Fugaku's wife could conjure at a moment's notice. "Do not be alarmed. You may pick up my call on the nearest video screen, I believe that this conversation is one to be held face to face."

"Alright." The man had a strange way of telling her not to be alarmed, but she activates it all the same. "It's on." Though how long before her husband would arrive was anyone's guess.

And had someone guessed five seconds, they would be right. "Mikoto, what's going on?" An eyebrow rises as he turns the corner, having come down from his study when he heard the home phone ring. "...Madara." His eyes narrow at the sight of his cousin. "You have a reason for contacting us, I take it?" Their relationship had never really recovered after their falling out, and even now, he was suspicious of any contact from Madara. It usually did not bode well.

Madara sighs, having expected this reaction from Fugaku. "Yes, it's rather important. However, do not begin your celebrations quite yet, for there is a great deal to tell you."

The more he talked, the more ominous it sounded. For someone in charge of such a large family, the man had clearly never developed very much in the way of bedside manner. "We're listening." Still, it had to be important if he was contacting them after all these years. "What is it?"

Well, then it was time to get right down to it. "Your son is alive. I have seen Sasuke myself, and spoke to him less than a day ago. And Madara had briefly enjoyed it, before discovering that the boy was, at best, deliberately suicidal, and at worst, complacently so.

"Madara, I never thought you were capable of THIS level of cruelty." Of course, Mikoto had always thought him to be at best a control freak, but this was unbelievable. "We saw the body ourselves. Let the dead rest in peace for Heaven's Sake!"

"The cruelty of it is not that I am telling you, but what the boy suffered after we all believed him to be dead." Even Madara would admit that his imaginings were rather horrific. "And it can be none other than him, because there is only one man of approximately twenty four years old who could possibly have both the eyes and psychic abilities of an Uchiha, as well as the power to slip into the shadows." Whatever Mikoto tried to deny, the end result was the same. "It has come to my attention that the boy's death was a hoax, and that he was instead sold to a scientist by the name of Orochimaru by way of black market slave trafficking."

Mikoto had never been torn between fainting and homicidal rage before. If Madara was lying, she would murder him herself. She wasn't sure how, but she would. If he was telling the truth though, well on second thought the urge to vomit was almost overpowering as was the one to race to her baby who she hadn't seen in over a decade.

Fugaku's reaction was decidedly more tempered. "You warned us not to begin the celebrations just yet. Why?" What was going on that Madara was trying to protect them from?

Madara sighs, feeling just a tinge of remorse regarding the boy's fate. However, at least that could be changed now. "Sasuke is currently being held by the CIA as the suspect of a series of murders, and is going to stand trial in the near future. He is accused of one hundred and forty eight murder charges."

Suddenly, a heart attack looked like a very real possibility for the middle aged woman who had always been in exceptional health. "Do you believe he did it?" If he had, why? Never mind. If what Madara said was accurate, it was likely revenge or self-defense.

"There is no doubt that he did. He admitted to each and every one, and listed ones not originally
attributed to him, but that fit his pattern as well. He…” And here is where his opinion of the boy wavered. "He turned himself in when my son and nephew discovered him. They were the agents assigned to the case of a shadow-walking serial killer. It seems that Itachi read into the memories of the crime scene where Danzo was murdered, and discovered that Sasuke was the culprit. When they discovered him after his murder of Orochimaru Sannin, the medical scientist who held him captive for seven years, he turned himself in. Apparently, he had no reason to keep going, now that his revenge is complete."

Fugaku's eyes darken in mixed understanding and disbelief. He could understand the story, but attributing it to the sweet ten-year-old boy that he remembered was…impossible. "And you're certain that this was Sasuke?"

Madara nods. "Yes, I am. And as you can imagine, the punishment Sasuke is facing will be extremely severe."

Mikoto could read between the lines easily enough. She wasn't sure if she should be grateful or not that Madara had told them. They were going to lose Sasuke all over again, but this time they would have a chance to say goodbye. "We could get him out." More specifically, she could. "Couldn't we?" With magic. It had to be possible.

And it is for precisely this reason that Madara had made sure that all of his home lines were secure. "We will. But first, Sasuke will have to die. At least for long enough that the courts believe that their serial killer has passed on. Shisui and Itachi have devised a rather…vexing plan to save Sasuke, and by extension Itachi from the metaphorical guillotine."

Mikoto bites her lower lip. "I suppose that's the only way they'll ever stop searching." If they thought he was dead. Even if they got him out, they'd look for him.

Fugaku frowns. Not liking the fact that Madara was sharing so few details. "What exactly do you mean by saving Itachi?" What did Itachi have to do with Sasuke? Aside from the fact that he arrested Sasuke.

And that is precisely what vexed Madara the most. "It would seem that your suicidal son is Itachi's magnolia, his soulmate."

Itachi and Shisui had been devastated by Sasuke's death, but neither Fugaku nor Mikoto had ever foreseen that. Though having a soulmate would matter little, if Sasuke was about to be executed. Other than the fact it would devastate Itachi. Which was a travesty by itself.

"We'll discuss that more later." She was more concerned about saving his life. "That's wonderful he found his match, but what do you want us to do?"

"Simply play the part of the distraught parents. I shall have his new identity set in stone within two days, Shisui is consorting with a witch to brew the necessary potion to mimic death, and his vampire guardians have been notified of these events, and are standing by to spirit him back to Toronto once we have him. Itachi has taken over Sasuke's immediate care and a great deal of the investigation and preparation for the trial. After all is said and done, I suggest we give them all the space they require for their...reunion."

Fugaku rolls his eyes. If his son wanted to elope with his lover, then that was a better outcome than the one currently presented to him. "Is there anything else that we should know before booking our tickets?" He planned on wasting no time now that he knew his son still lived.

Madara grows quiet, solemn, stern. "There is one detail that may make for a less than pleasant
reunion. It is no fault of yours, and I assured Sasuke of such, but…the child was told many times while enslaved that the two of you had sold him to Danzo, who then sold him to Orochimaru. He knows now that those were lies told to him, but his temperament changed very little. He may not resent you as he did before, but the child is still bitter over his imprisonment, and seems, at best, indifferent towards the two of you."

The pleasantness just kept on coming. The only way this could get any worse is if Sasuke was actually dead or outright despised them. Though Mikoto knew that indifference was little, if any better. In some ways, it was worse. "Then we'll book our flight immediately." A trial like this would take time to organize. "I assume the trial won't take place for quite awhile and this shouldn't be an issue."

"The investigations are only just ending. For the speed of the investigation, you have Sasuke's cooperation to thank." Though that mattered little, as it meant that the trial would start, and Madara expected that to take quite some time, two weeks at the very least, and that was if they ran sessions all day, every day. "There is more than enough time for you to 'say your goodbyes' before the plan is put into motion."

She looks at her husband before nodding at the screen. "We understand. We'll be there soon." Madara inclines his head slightly. "I will see that one of the guest rooms is ready." After all, he refused to be called a poor host just because of one falling out. "And let us hope that neither of our sons unwittingly sabotage our plans." Because heavens knew that Uchiha men had a habit of doing that.
Sleep hadn't come easily, but a few somewhat restless hours were better than nothing. Sasuke groans quietly as he sets himself back into an upright position, rolling his shoulders as much as his binds will allow, silently cursing at the stiffness of them. But...he'd slept in worse conditions before. He would survive, at least long enough for the people deciding his fate to finally make a decision.

Itachi walks into the cell, carrying a computer and a tray of food and water. From his arm hung a bag filled with a change of clothes for Sasuke when his soulmate finally felt like taking a shower and washing all of the sweat off. "Good morning, Sasuke."

"Morning." Sasuke eyes the circular orb of a computer in Itachi's hands. "So what brings you back here so soon?" Wait, was it soon? Time was impossible to tell in this place, thanks to the constant light. And being bound didn't make sleeping very easy either. He could have been asleep an hour, two, four, ten...who knew?

"Well, I need to know what you know." Itachi smiles at him. "I can let you write. But the more you tell us, the better your chances of getting off death row."

"Alright. I guess it'll give me something to do." Sasuke leans forward, inching away from the wall. "But exactly what do you want me to write about?" He could fill several books with the things he knew. Maybe several dozen. "Just the slave trafficking? Or do you want black market arms and substances in there as well? International crime rings? I could tell you more than you'd ever want to know about illegal trade."

"Everything that you know." Itachi looks at him with cautious eyes. "The more we know, the more we can stop them and the better your chances."

Sasuke considers the offer, and even though he doubted it would go over as well as Itachi hoped, he couldn't bring himself to destroy the hope evident in Itachi's voice. "Okay. Unbind my hands and get me a computer interface." It would be faster than writing it all down by hand. "I'll give you everything that I know about every criminal organization I know of; who their power players are, what they specialize in, and their allies in the business and political spheres."

"Alright." Itachi nods at the other Uchiha as he kneels down, hoping that this time they had done it. "They won't be crazy about you having access to a computer. So I'll just get you without the Internet." They might have saved Sasuke. "You can type on a word document and just hit print."

The captive Uchiha shivers as he feels Itachi's fingers brushing against the skin of his arms, unlocking his shackles. When they come free, he twists his arms back into a semi-comfortable position, rubbing his wrists to get the blood circulating properly. "Well, that was fun. Remind me never to let Shisui play cops and robbers with me after this."

"Yes...let's try to avoid that outcome again." Itachi purses his lips, not pleased with the mention of Sasuke's arrest. But instead of contesting it, he holds out a bottle of water. "Here, you should have something to drink." Shisui had mentioned concerns about Sasuke getting dehydrated, so he'd brought in a few bottles of water for Sasuke this time.

"Right." Sasuke reaches for one immediately, pressing his thumb to the top of the bottle to spin
open the top. As soon as he presses the bottle to his lips, the cold liquid splashes down his throat, soothing a little of the dry ache that had taken root there. It was enough that he could ignore the few drops of sweat running from his temples. When the bottle is drained, he lowers it into his lap and closes his eyes, running a damp hand through his hair to push back his sweaty bangs.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome." Itachi sighs, wishing that there was more he could do for Sasuke now. "Do you have everything you need to make the records?"

Sasuke glances over the tray of food and the modified computer. "Yeah. It'll take a while, a few weeks...maybe even a few months, but I'll get you all the information you can handle and more." Sasuke had a job to do. And that was to make Itachi's, or at least Shisui's job easier. Itachi might be retiring, but there were still bad guys out there. And Sasuke was determined to make a dent in them, even if he couldn't do it in person.

"Thank you." Itachi runs long fingers through Sasuke's sweaty hair. "And I'll arrange for you to have a shower later. You could certainly use one."

"Hn, you're telling me." Sasuke had to admit that even having blood all over him didn't make him feel this gross. The sooner he could have a shower, the better. But he would play by their damn bureaucratic rules. It's not like he had any other choice. "Alright, go yell at the pencil pushers. I'll see if I can get a chapter typed up before you get back." At least this would keep him occupied for a while. Sasuke had been worried that he was going to die of boredom in here.

Itachi rolls his eyes despite himself. "Sassy as usual." At least that was one part of Sasuke that hadn't faded with his fighting spirit. "If I take more than two hours, I'll return with more food."

"Mhm." Sasuke's eyes focus on the screens before him as he boots up the computer. He cracks his knuckles loudly and sets about typing up a storm. Let it never be said that an Uchiha was inefficient.

Shisui smiles as he walks into his and Itachi's investigation room. Predictably, screens were up all over the place as Itachi plotted ways of getting Sasuke off death row. Not that it was going to happen, but he would let his cousin believe it could for a little while longer. "So, I just checked on Sasuke and found him typing up a masterpiece. Care to tell me what you've got him working on?"

"He's typing up as much as he can about the criminal underworld." It was the best chance they had of saving him. "It'll do a lot of good."

That was certainly impressive. Shisui would have clocked their cousin at over seventy words a minute, based on the speed of those fingers. "That kind of information will save a lot of lives."

Itachi nods. Hopefully, it would also save his own. "My thoughts exactly." Though what Shisui was up to was uncertain.

Right, well, now that he knew what Sasuke was up to, it was about time that Shisui dropped another bombshell. "By the way...your father's gone and called Fugaku and Mikoto to inform them that their son is alive and being held in CIA custody for one hundred and forty-eight counts of murder. And they're on their way here now."

Itachi groans. "It's too early for this..." They were still working on the case file. They didn't have
time to be explaining everything that Madara no doubt left out when informing Sasuke's parents of everything. "If we can't save him..." If their plan failed, this was going to destroy Sasuke's parents right along with him.

"Then we save him." And they would do this their way, without leaving Sasuke any room for protest. "For now, let's work on cleaning up the case file and putting all of the details in order. Then, we can prepare ourselves for Mikoto and Fugaku's-"

"I want to see my son, now!"

"Arrival..." Shisui slams his palm to his face. Why is it that their relatives just walked in here without heed for protocol, demanding to see their cousin all locked up in a cell?

Itachi rubs the back of his head sheepishly as Mikoto and Fugaku stride forward. Typical Uchihas...

Fugaku's eyes survey the floor of offices and meeting rooms as they move towards where he could sense Itachi and Shisui through the wall. He remembered the part he had to play, and he would play it with dignity and stoicism, as he did every other role. For to do otherwise would be suspicious. He turns the corner with his wife, catching sight of the two young agents working his son's case. "Itachi. Shisui." He watches them both assessingly. "It has been some time, hasn't it?"

"It has." Itachi sighs as he looks him over warily. "I wish that we were meeting under better circumstances. Rest assured, we're doing all we can to get him off death row."

"Of course." Fugaku doesn't bat an eye, remaining calm and collected. "Thank you for your efforts."

"Thank you." Mikoto tightly embraces Itachi as she tries to blink back tears. "We appreciate it more than you'll ever know."

Shisui was rather impressed, Mikoto was laying it on pretty thick. Maybe all of this would work out right after all. "I assume you're barging in here because, like Uncle Madara, you want to see Sasuke?"

"Of course, we do!" Mikoto looks at Shisui as if he had grown another head. "Our son has essentially come back from the dead."

The agent sighs, then marches over to the desk console, bringing up a secure channel. "I'll have to clear it with our boss first." But clearly, standard protocol did not apply to the Uchiha.

"I doubt Jiraiya will object." Itachi shrugs. "If he does, I'm resigning once this case is over so he can give me whatever slap on the wrist he wants."

Fugaku raises an eyebrow upon hearing THAT little piece of news. He wondered if Madara knew what his son was planning to do. But then the screen beeps, and a man with white hair appears there. "Yeah, Shisui? Do you need something?"

"Well..." He glances at the two unyielding parents before him. "Fugaku and Mikoto Uchiha request permission to meet with Sasuke Uchiha."

"More Uchihas?" Jiraiya raises an eyebrow. "And they want to see the kid because...?"

"Uh...they're his parents, Sir." Shisui ruffles his hair sheepishly. "And I don't think they're going to take no for an answer."
Jiraiya sighs, nodding his approval. "Fine, they can go in. Though one of these days, we're going to need to upgrade to an Uchiha-proof security system."

"There is no security system that could ever keep our family out." Itachi and Mikoto automatically correct him.

"Clearly, or the kid wouldn't have been able to kill a hundred and fifty people." Ugh, these Uchihas were such a handful. "Go on, then. You have an hour. But only two at a time, and Sasuke isn't allowed outside of his cell." No matter how uncomfortable they might find it. If he let Sasuke out for something like visitation, his superiors would give him a hell of an earful, and it would sabotage any attempts they made to get execution off the table.

"Lead the way then." Mikoto smiles sweetly at him. "Thank you for your cooperation in this matter." Had he not cooperated, she probably would have employed some more...persuasive tactics.

"Right. Thank you, Sir." Shisui cuts the connection, saving Jiraiya from the deadly wrath of one Mikoto Uchiha. "If the two of you will follow me, then…" He gestures out the door and down the hall. "On account of his abilities, he's been placed into a special containment cell. Shadow-walkers are rare so we don't have a large supply of the light panels needed to keep one contained. So when you enter the cell, brace yourselves. It will be bright."

The Uchiha woman nods grimly. She was certain whatever she was about to see in regards to their treatment of Sasuke was going to enrage her, but she was equally sure she would burst into tears as soon as she saw him. Both of happiness and out of guilt.

"Alright." Shisui marches up to the door, inputting the codes needed to unlock the heavy, bulletproof shielding. "I'll open the door again when you want to be let out. And I do hope that the two of you can reconcile with him. He's been...very lonely." He opens the door, light spilling out from inside the cell, courtesy of the panels lining every surface. "Good luck."

Worried only slightly for his wife's safety, Fugaku steps into the room first. After all, this was no longer their innocent, ten-year-old son, but a grown man. A young man who apparently was quite proficient when it came to murder. And sitting there on the floor, dark eyes focused and equally dark hair laying disheveled and raked back over his forehead, was such a young man typing away at a glowing keyboard, three projected screens hovering before him as he switched between them. Even after so many years...Fugaku knew in an instant who this young man was.

Mikoto wanted to cry out to him or to embrace him in a loving tackle-hug of doom, but that probably wasn't the wisest idea. "Sasuke?" He was a prisoner and had PSTD. Not to mention, he apparently could be quite sadistic when he needed to be.

Nevertheless, dark eyes drift away from the screen, fingers not stopping even as he glances towards the door. After all, he'd memorized the keyboard, and looking at it now was just to have something for his eyes to do. Seeing the forms of two faded figures from his childhood walk in was unexpected, though. "...Yes."

She didn't know what to say. What could be said after not seeing your son for years and believing him dead, only to discover that he was awaiting trial for murdering over a hundred people? "I know that you probably don't recognize us." How could he be expected to after all this time? "But I am Mikoto and this is Fugaku. We're your parents."

Fugaku's eyes narrow slightly as dark eyes lock on his. No, it wasn't that Sasuke didn't recognize them, he did, if only vaguely. No, what was held in his gaze was the indifference that Madara spoke of. They could be there or not, and it wouldn't make a difference to him.
"I know." Sasuke's fingers slowly come to a stop, his hands falling to rest in his lap as he gazes evenly at them. "But why are you here?"

It was just as bad as Madara and Shisui had warned them. No matter though. The most important thing was saving his life. "Sasuke, I know that you have no real reason to believe this." God only knows what Orochimaru had said to the boy over the years. "But we're your parents and we do love you. There was a body. We truly thought you were dead, if we had known..." She trails off, not trusting herself not to break down in sobs. "Well, the very least we can do is be here for you now."

Here for him in his last days? Sasuke was pretty sure that was either masochistic or stupid. "You do realize that despite Itachi's efforts and vain hopes, I'm likely facing execution in a matter of months." He wasn't going to sugarcoat it for a couple of people he didn't really care about.

Orochimaru had completely shredded their sweet boy's psyche. It was obvious in his response, but that didn't make it any less heartbreaking. "Yes, we realize that." She sighs as she slowly reaches for him, giving him time to back away. "That doesn't change the fact that you shouldn't go through this alone." Sudden movements were probably not advised.

The orb-like computer goes to sleep in Sasuke's lap, leaving him unmoving as his birth-mother's hand reaches for his cheek. He allows the fingertips to brush it, offering no reciprocation or resistance.

Mikoto sighs softly at that, but smiles all the same. It was a start. The fact he was allowing it at all was a miracle.

Sensing the air around their son clearing, Fugaku takes a step forward, only to stop in his tracks when Sasuke's body freezes with rigid tension, dark eyes flickering to him with suspicion and wariness in their depths. Clearly, the boy was more comfortable being touched by his mother, than approached by his father. And from the unprovable rumor surrounding Orochimaru, he had some theories as to why. So, conversation seemed the wisest course of action. "What are you writing?"

Sasuke blinks, then relaxes slightly as his eyes turn back to the computer in his lap. "I'm writing down all of the information I have about the various black market trades and criminal organizations I know about. This way, Shisui will have something for him and the other agents to work off of in their investigations. At the very least, no one is going to be able to hide their dirty work anymore." He places his hand on the computer, feeling along the smooth lines and planes. "I was just working on the most...personal project. The supernatural slave trade, for both scientific and...other purposes."

"Oh. Well, that's very important work." Mikoto smiles at him. "You'll save a lot of people with that kind of information." She just wished someone had been able to save their baby boy sooner.

"Yeah, if nothing else, at least the CIA and Interpol might get off their asses and finally do something." Not that Sasuke had much hope of them really being effective. But maybe there were a few agents who would take the ramblings of a serial killer seriously. But more importantly, his parents were somehow here, and not staring at him like an animal in a cage. "Did Madara tell you that I was here?" That seemed to him to be the most likely source of the information.

"He did." Fugaku crosses his arms, trying to appear less threatening to his son as he surveys the room. Top to bottom, it was made of light panels, and it was uncomfortably warm. Sasuke showed signs of exhaustion, and the circles beneath his eyes, though not pronounced yet, were darkening. Clearly, the child took after his mother's side of the family, else there would be no reason to go to such extreme lengths to keep him imprisoned. "He also mentioned that you share the abilities of your mother's parents. I had thought the line of inheritance had been broken when she never
developed the same powers."

"I never really had a reason to." Mikoto sighs and shakes her head. "I think it's mostly either taught or on instinct. You'd need to be scared or angry enough to activate them, I believe. Though I'm sure Madara's charming personality had me close to the line of developing them more than once."

"Or in enough pain." Sasuke's eyes grow dark once more. "You should add to the record that the abilities can be tortured out as well." He remembered the day well when, in the middle of a session, everything just began slipping through him. That was the day that Orochimaru confirmed what he was.

Mikoto sighs and embraces him. "I'm so sorry, Sasuke." If only they had known, none of this would have happened. "For everything."

Sasuke glances at her blankly. "Everything is a lot of things. Besides, the people who should be sorry are already dead. I made sure of that."

Fugaku's gaze hardens. The certainty in Sasuke's voice left no doubt as to what he'd done. When Madara had first called and told them, he had doubts about whether or not Sasuke could really have killed someone. Now, there was no doubt left in his mind that his son was a seasoned, talented killer. "Good, they deserved no less." He only wished that it had not had to be Sasuke who dirtied his hands with their blood, condemning himself along with them.

She shivers at the tone in his voice, but holds him all the same. If he could survive this, they could help him through the horrors of his past. For now though, she could only hope that on some level he was comforted by their presence. "He's right about that." She manages a smile. "We love you Sasuke."

Maybe, but they shouldn't, and it was a bit strange for Sasuke to hear. "Uh…right." She was much more…affectionate than the people he usually had to put up with. Though Temari was often just overbearing.

Fugaku sighs. Clearly, this was not going to be an easy task, repairing their relationship with their son. Family was obviously not something high on his list of priorities after so long living either on his own and on the move, or with a small coven of vampires. "Mikoto, perhaps I should go and speak with the head of this department while you remain here with Sasuke." Some time alone with his mother might help, and there was also this cell to discuss. "These conditions are appalling."

"Yes, of course." Mikoto nods at Fugaku. "You don't mind, do you?" He'd probably be relieved not to be outnumbered, but it was hard to tell what exactly was going through Sasuke's mind.

Sasuke shakes his head. "No." He wasn't entirely sure, but he thought that maybe Fugaku had noticed his discomfort around men, particularly older ones. Then again, it could just be that the man's pride wouldn't allow his son to be kept in a cage like an animal. But that could be debated another day.

"Very well." Fugaku turns away from his son and strides to the door, knocking on it and glancing back over his shoulder just once. "Look after him, Mikoto." The door opens, Shisui's face visible beyond the heavy metal barrier.

"I will." Mikoto smiles at him. "Well, it seems that you're quite the accomplished typist." It sounded so silly and she knew it, but other than commenting on his looks it seemed to be the only thing she really knew about him anymore. Whatever she knew when he was ten, might mean nothing now.
He shrugs as the door closes behind his father. "It keeps me busy." Though Sasuke was starting to suspect that Itachi wasn't only asking him to do it for the sake of information or material to use as an appeal to save him, but also to keep his mind from wandering to places it shouldn't in a cell where all he could do was sit and think.

Which was something at least. Mikoto suddenly feels rather tongue tied. What could she possibly say to him that wouldn't bring up bad memories or feel shallow? "That and you're helping a lot of people." She sighs as she kisses Sasuke's forehead. "I would have done the same thing and worse to them. You shouldn't feel guilty."

"Don't worry, I don't feel guilty over them." Over Itachi was another story, but Sasuke wasn't about to open up that can of worms. "I killed the ones who deserved it, and if they really pissed me off, then they got it worse. I never feel guilty about any of my kills. The kind of people I took out don't deserve remorse."

"Good." She smiles at him. "I'm glad you don't feel guilty...is there anything you would like to know?" Perhaps it would be best to allow him to lead the conversation.

There were many things that Sasuke wanted to know, but none of which he could do anything about from in here. "...What happened when you thought I died? Madara mentioned that Orochimaru faked my death, that there was a body, but...obviously it wasn't me. So how was it that everyone believed I was dead, and no one thought that I'd been kidnapped or sold?"

"There was a body." Mikoto winces as she remembers that day in vivid detail. "The only explanation that I can conceive of at the moment is perhaps he had a shapeshifter act as a doppelganger shortly after capturing you and killed that shifter in your place." It would explain why they had been identical in appearance.

If that were true, it would mean that Orochimaru and Danzo had been working together to target him specifically right from the start. "They must have wanted a shadow-walker badly if they went to that kind of trouble to make me disappear. I hadn't even started showing any abilities yet." No... all of his abilities had bloomed in that hellhole, where the petals glowed like scarlet blood. All save for the ones still a pure, glowing white on his arm.

"He'd likely been researching our kind extensively." Mikoto sighs and shakes her head. "We're almost impossible to find and even harder to study. It would have made sense to target a child who hadn't shown their abilities yet."

And because of his mixed heritage, there was no guarantee he'd have gotten them. "I was just the unlucky one who was chosen as the guinea pig." Sasuke honestly wasn't sure if that was better or worse. "I suppose maybe I should thank the bastard, though. Without him, my abilities might never have awoken, and there would still be a lot of bad people running around, pretending to be good people, when really they're murdering, enslaving, and...torturing people behind everyone's backs."

That was a rather macabre way to look at it, but accurate enough. Mikoto didn't know what to say to that exactly. "Yes, that's true." She smiles at him. "You've done a lot of good."

Sasuke rolls his eyes and leans back against the wall. "Yes. I've done lots of 'good' things with my life." The law sure didn't see it that way. "I commit murder on contract and don't even get paid for it. Clearly, I've been doing things right."

She wasn't sure what he had been living off of, if he didn't get paid for it. Though she didn't wish to pry into that particular aspect of his life. It was a miracle as it was that he was even talking to her. "You killed people who should have been put down a long time ago." She shakes her head and
smiles at him. "Granted... a more traditional occupation would have been safer and perhaps more ideal, but someone had to do it. If we can get you off death row, there might a chance to start over to some degree..."

Now, Sasuke had to wonder if his mother was smoking something. "Unless I turn into a vampire and outlive whatever sentence they give me, I don't see how." And by that point... Itachi would be dead, and Sasuke would be alone forever.

"You'll see in time." She shakes her head. "Better a life in prison than an early death. At least this way we can see you and we would do our best to put you in one of those... luxury prisons."

That honestly wasn't much better, seeing as he'd be locked in a cell just like this, probably in solitary constantly so that he wouldn't escape. "Well, you almost make it sound appealing. Living the rest of my life in a small, intolerably bright room where I can hardly sleep, and confined so that I don't lose my temper and hurt someone, or use any shadow I can find to escape." Because that's exactly what they'd do in order to keep him locked up. "Though maybe the food will be half-decent."

"I doubt they'll go to that extreme. You have a very sympathetic case." Mikoto sighs as she embraces him more.

"They would be idiots if they didn't." Sasuke sighs, finally leaning into the woman's hold as he closes his eyes. "...I hate this place... it's almost impossible to sleep in here, even with Itachi's help."

That was progress. He was actually leaning into her instead of just coolly tolerating her presence. "I know." She sighs as she strokes his hair. "If I had my way, we'd be leaving with you now." They would eventually. The working plan was utterly psychotic, but it was their best option for now.

Sasuke smiles sadly as he blocks out the light with his mother's shirt. "If I had my way, Orochimaru never would have found me in the first place." But it was an idle wish, one long since lost to time and wicked design. He was so sleepy... "I'd be... with Itachi... and I wouldn't be afraid." He takes a deep breath, mind already drifting as his words ran away with him.

"I know." The raven haired woman continues running her fingers through his hair as it seemed to soothe him. "We'll make the best of this situation though. You're alive. That's what matters most and Itachi clearly does adore you."

He nods, sighing unhappily. "I love him... more than he'll ever get to know. I just... want him to be happy."

Definitely soulmates then. This was all so complicated. So wrong. Damn Orochimaru. "I'm sure that you will get to tell him one day." She smiles at him. "First things first though, we have to make sure that you live long enough to do that."

A deep, slightly staggered breath answers her, the exhaustion forcing Sasuke to sleep. After only a few hours at best, he was breaking down physically, mentally, emotionally... everything was deteriorating. And soon, there wasn't going to be anything left.

She sighs and tries her best to put him in a comfortable position as she awaits her husband's return. He'd be back soon. She knew it.

Just under an hour later, the door opens once more, and Fugaku steps inside, his expression stern
and displeased, but softening some at the sight of his son's head laying in his mother's lap as she played with his hair. The boy had looked so tired, and Fugaku couldn't blame him. It would be hard for anyone to sleep with this much light bombarding them. "How is he?"

"About as well as can be expected." Mikoto looks at him with worried eyes. "Which is to say not well, but he still somehow has his sanity."

 Barely, it seemed, and he wouldn't keep it long locked in a prison like this. "The head of the department is a reasonable man, however, his superiors are insisting that Sasuke poses too great a security risk to place him in normal confinement. I explained quite clearly to them that keeping him in here was negatively impacting his health, and therefore his contribution to the case." But since when did bureaucrats like to listen to logic? "Jiraiya assures me that he'll see that Sasuke has better food and water, but his superiors have blocked him on the request to move him from this room. He will still sleep badly."

 "Very well then." She shakes her head and sighs dramatically. "I suppose that we'll have to be sadistic and sick Madara on them. You did try to be reasonable."

Yes, and were Sasuke a normal criminal, there would have been no issue. "They fear that he will turn his powers on them if they lessen his conditions any further. They fear HIM. And they fear what he might do if given the opportunity." Fugaku could not blame them for having that fear, but he did not like that Sasuke was its recipient. But considering his track record, they had every reason to be afraid. "But I will speak to Madara when we return to the estate. Did you have Sasuke speak while I was gone?"

 "A little." Mikoto nods at his question. "He was interested in what happened after his death, feels no guilt for what he's done as he shouldn't, and is very attached to Itachi." That was about the size of it really

"And Itachi to him, judging by the way the boy is working to save Sasuke and make the most of his legacy." He had seen the case Itachi was putting together, and it was massive, taking into account every angle imaginable, including background investigations into every single one of Sasuke's victims. There was definitely a pattern there. "It seems that Itachi makes a perfect partner for Sasuke." Sensitive, gentle, patient, and with a strong sense of justice…all the things that Sasuke would need from him.

She smiles at him. Fugaku had always been more practical than fanciful. "Well yes, that's generally what people mean by soulmates." So she couldn't resist teasing him. Just a little bit.

A tiny smile twitches onto the man's face. "Yes, so it seems." Now they simply had to rescue Sasuke, and the two could ride off into the sunset together. First, though, they would stay and let the boy get some rest. To be at all functional, he was going to need it.
Shisui felt like he'd barely gotten any sleep the past several weeks. The case file had come together quickly because of Sasuke's cooperation, and Itachi had thrown himself into investigating every single target on Sasuke's list. They'd found cases of black market dealing, drugs, human experimentation, more murder than Shisui had ever seen in his life, and...a few cases where, like the priest, they truly were better off dead than in prison. There were just some crimes you didn't commit and expect to get any respect for in prison. So Shisui understood now why some of the victims were treated with such violence. If it had been him, he would have castrated some of them first and let them bleed out from there.

He gives the case file one last once over, then turns to his cousin. "They should be finishing up the opening statements soon." They'd been kept out of the courtroom for now so that they would be more objective witnesses. Objective his ass, like they were ever going to be objective when their little cousin's life was on the line. But he could at least pretend to be, for the sake of an audience.

"Yes, they should." Itachi nods at him. "Are you ready?" Well as ready as anyone could be in this situation. He still couldn't believe this was happening himself.

"Yes." Shisui knew exactly what he would have to do over the course of the next few weeks, while all of the evidence was presented and the arguments made. The prosecutor on the case was an old man that Shisui hated with a passion, even more so now that he knew the man had been friends with Danzo. Apparently, he'd taken the case to ensure that proper justice was done, getting special permission from the DA's office to temporarily come out of retirement in order to attend this case. Obviously the corruption ran deep. "How about you? How are you feeling?"

"It doesn't matter." Itachi barely refrains from rolling his eyes at the question. "All that matters is putting on a decent enough pokerface that they won't suspect anything, and getting through this sham of a trial."

Sham it might be, at least in terms of how it would turn out, but Shisui knew better than that. "This is our chance to bring a lot of dirty laundry to light. Let's focus on bringing to light as many of the crimes as possible, and dole out a few big doses of real justice."

Shisui was clearly taking the glass half full approach. It was likely the healthier option, but Itachi couldn't bring himself to really FEEL it. "We'll do that as well." He had no faith in the system any longer to deliver justice, but Itachi would destroy their careers all the same. "I'd rather count on the court of public opinion to settle this, but on the off chance they actually get something right we'll do it."

"Then let's hit them twice and make sure they can't slip the noose." Itachi could appeal to the public, and Shisui would take the legal side of things. After all, it would be all the more effective
to box them in from both sides and make sure that no one guilty could escape this time. "And when all of this is said and done, we'll ship the two of you out of here and you can have your happily ever after. I can deal with all of the fallout." And Shisui would admit that he felt a slightly sadistic pleasure in the idea of bringing the supposedly upstanding citizens on the list Sasuke had given them to a hard and brutal justice.

"I wouldn't force you to deal with all that alone." Itachi shakes his head. "They'll come after both of us anyway." That or hire people to. Maybe bringing Shisui into this hadn't been the best idea in hindsight.

"Don't worry, 'Tachi." Shisui grins reassuringly. "Once this trial is over, I'm going to call up Shikaku and Kakashi and get them in on this. Ibiki too, if I can manage it. No one is going to slip through the cracks this time. I'm sure that Uncle Madara will want to be sure of that as well."

How the man could grin at a time like this was utterly beyond Itachi. He could force himself to put on a stoic face, but to smile in any way would have been impossible for Itachi. "Let's just get this over with." Not that they had much choice in the matter.

Okay, Sasuke might never have actually set foot in a courtroom before, but he was pretty sure that their team of two prosecutors wasn't your standard setup. Clearly, someone in the CIA REALLY didn't like him, and there was nothing that Shisui and Itachi could do about it. The old man and old woman at the other bench were staring at him with the most disapproving and covertly menacing glares he had ever seen, short of Danzo and Orochimaru.

Though it did beg the question as to why they dug up these two old fossils to interrogate him in a sealed courtroom in front of a jury that…didn't really matter, and a defense lawyer that would no doubt try her best to lessen his sentence, but probably knew that this battle was already lost.

He smiles at the woman with the red eyes, sitting calmly next to him. "You didn't have to do this, you know. I'm sure you're being paid plenty, but…you've seen the case file."

"I volunteered." She shakes her head. "You aren't the only one who detested Danzo and Orochimaru." She smiles at him. "I'll do my best, but I can't make any promises."

"I know." On both counts, actually. "If this goes sideways…it's not your fault." Sasuke knew that, and knew he only had himself to blame for this mess he was in.

She sighs and nods as they get into position. Kurenai wasn't looking forward to this one. It wouldn't be easy, but she'd try anyway. The kid didn't deserve what was likely about to happen to him.

With a single bang of the gavel, the courtroom falls to silence. "The first motion by the prosecution is to call the defendant to the stand." The elderly judge looks down upon the court, his dark eyes surveying the room carefully. "Sasuke Uchiha, please rise and take your place on the stand."

Sasuke nods silently, rising to his feet to approach the box with some semblance of dignity, despite the agents watching over him to make sure he didn't try anything. He didn't like having his hands bound, but accepted that they saw it as a necessary security measure. After all, these were dangerous hands. He sits on the uncomfortable bench in the witness box, his eyes falling on the old man at the other bench, one of the fossils that he wasn't looking forward to speaking with. Not that he had a choice.
Judge Sarutobi nods, turning to the prosecution. "The prosecution may now ask their questions of the defendant."

Homura smirks as he strides over to Sasuke. Taking out a stack of papers, a printed version of his written confession. "According to these documents, you've confessed to one hundred and forty-eight murders." He looks at him. "Is that correct? Is this not your signature?"

"It is." Fantastic, they were going with the direct questions already. Sasuke may not know much about courts, but he knew about interrogation. This wasn't going to be fun.

"Is there any reason why we should knowingly let someone who has killed over a hundred people live?" He raises an eyebrow. "You already confessed and based on all the documents you've provided, I doubt you could even claim insanity."

This was something Shisui had warned him about, questions that asked for a clearly opinionated answer. "There is argument regarding my knowledge of the black market and its power players being of use to international law enforcement agencies to decrease the amount of crime both inside and outside this country."

"I suppose that's right." He raises another eyebrow. "How do we know that the information is accurate though?"

Sasuke's eye twitches slightly. "You don't. And there's the problem. It's too often that the law enforcement and justice systems don't listen to the people with the right information. Proper, in-depth investigations will turn up everything I've given to the government and more."

Kurenai didn't miss the way the elderly man's eyes narrowed at that. "You're quite arrogant for someone on trial for mass murder." This wasn't going anywhere good.

"Then maybe it'll inspire the police, FBI, and CIA to get off their asses for once..." Sasuke's fingers twitch, so he clenches them into fists, trying to remain calm.

Sarutobi clears his throat loudly. "Does the prosecution have more questions for the defendant?" He couldn't allow a verbal sparring match to go on if there were no questions being asked and answered.

"No. I think that he's made it quite clear that he's guilty and feels no remorse." The prosecutor nods as if that settled everything.

Dark eyes narrow at the prosecutor, but Sasuke remains silent. If he started yelling at the old man now, he'd just make everything worse and be found in contempt of court. Even if he hated the ineffectiveness of the justice system, he wasn't going to go fucking with it himself.

"Very well. Does the defense counsel have questions to pose to their client?" Sarutobi needed to move this on so that they could get past a judgment of character and on to the actual cases. By his count, they had to discuss fifteen every day just to get through them all in a reasonable timeframe.

"Why did you kill them?" Kurenai walks over to Sasuke. "You showed such brutality towards these individuals and most of them weren't connected to one another at all. You must have had a reason."

Apart from the fact that they were all assholes. "Some were personal, most were on commission. Their victims wanted them to be punished when the courts got it wrong." And Sasuke had taken the task of handing out justice very seriously. "The level of violence in the punishment fit the level of violence of the crime."
"Well, it will take time to prove whether these people did as you say, but that does seem to line up with everything else." She sighs as she looks at Sasuke. "Can you tell us more about your experience as Orochimaru's kidnapping victim?"

Sasuke bites his lip, takes a deep breath, then nods. "I wasn't Orochimaru's kidnapping victim. Not directly. The actual kidnapping was orchestrated by Danzo Shimura, while Orochimaru Sannin later provided the false body needed to convince the authorities that I'd been murdered after my abduction. It was part of their arrangement in which I was...purchased..." Sasuke grimaces at the memory of first being handed over to Orochimaru. "I was sold as a slave for scientific research on supernaturals. I was a 'rare specimen'. Danzo was the one who sold me to Orochimaru when I was ten years old."

There were horrified gasps in the courtroom. "I know this is painful for you to talk about, but please go on." She smiles at him encouragingly. "The more we know, the more we can try your case."

Right, because these were the things he WANTED to talk about. Still, he holds back his sarcasm for now. "After being sold to Orochimaru as a slave, I was locked in a cage underground for three years, undergoing routine experiments and...empowerment sessions in order to try to force my abilities to manifest. There were...between sixty and eighty of us there at the time. All boys, all between the ages of seven and sixteen. And all of us were held as prisoners for Orochimaru's experiments." He trembles a little at the memory of pale hands and a sickly purple tongue. "I was one of his 'favorites'. He and Danzo would call me a 'pet', just like some of the others."

"Objection!" The old woman next to the other prosecutor rises to her feet. "This is a trial to determine his guilt regarding the one hundred and forty-eight murders he has confessed to, not the alleged experiments of a well-respected medical scientist, and claimed to be funded by a respected politician and businessman."

"He was a kidnapping victim." Kurenai glares at her. "So object all you like, but this well-respected scientist of yours IS connected to this case. The fact he's dead and was 'well respected' doesn't negate that."

"And were he here to defend himself, rather than ruthlessly struck down by this violent and irreparably misguided youth, his word would certainly count for more than that of an exceptionally violent serial killer." Counselor Utatane folds her arms into long, wide sleeves. "Or have you forgotten that Dr. Sannin was the most devastating murder committed by this criminal? He was tortured before death as well as dismembered by your client."

"Counselor Utatane." Sarutobi glances down at her, shaking his head. "It is the turn of the defense to question the defendant. Please retake your seat."

Appearing as though she swallowed a freshly cut lemon, the counselor retakes her place behind the bench.

"Please be as descriptive as possible about what your situation was like and the information you have on hand that might help us save others like you." Kurenai smiles at him.

Instantly, Sasuke turns as white as a ghost. He was fully prepared to own up to what he'd done to others, but this...he was NOT prepared to relive what happened back then. "...I'll tell you about the experiments, but..." There was some of it that he just couldn't go over. Not again. Not fucking again... "There was...electroshock therapy. He inserted electrodes under our skin and shocked us four times a day, trying to stimulate our nervous systems into producing the powers we were supposed to have. Physical stimulation, emotional shock, fear, whatever would trigger enough
stress to bring them to the surface. Some people's gifts showed up early, like Haku's and
Kimimaro's, and some showed up later, like mine."

He takes a deep breath, fingers clenching tightly to the polished wooden rim of the box. "Once our
abilities manifested, he would move us to new holding cells, ones designed to keep us contained.
For Haku, it was a heated cell that pumped dry air in and humid air out. For Kimimaro…it was a
concrete bunker with tempered steel and titanium reinforcement. For me…light panels in the floor,
ceiling, and walls so that I couldn't dematerialize and escape. The only times we were let out was
for more experiments, or if Orochimaru was…bored." He bites his lip until he draws blood, the
scarlet liquid running from the corner of his mouth and down his chin.

Kurenai winces. It was worse than she thought. "Did any of the other boys survive?" Suddenly, she
was barely resisting the urge to vomit.

"…Three of us survived. One died four years ago, Haku died a few weeks ago." Sasuke grits his
teeth, tasting the blood on his tongue. "Gato had him and his soulmate killed. He told me so." So,
he'd gone after Gato. "That one was personal.""Your Honor, I have no further questions at this
time." Kurenai looks at him. She wouldn't be able to do it. Keep her temper. It was best to stop for
now. For everyone's sake, but especially Sasuke's.

"Very well." Sarutobi bangs his gavel, softly. "The defendant may now step down." He checks
over his notes, finding the names of two agents from the CIA, here to testify on the case. "We will
take a short recess before bringing in two of our expert witnesses."

Sasuke felt light-headed as he stepped down from the stand, his eyes clouding over as he tries not
to stumble. They'd stopped. They'd stopped before he'd had to…
He wanted to puke, he wanted to scream, he wanted to tear down the whole world until it all went
up in flames.

Immediately, Itachi races over to Sasuke. He had seen that look on his face. It was nothing short of
a miracle that Sasuke had kept his composure as well as he had during questioning.

Sasuke had barely made it to the bench when he very nearly collapsed against Itachi. His face was
as white as a sheet, his mind playing all of his worst memories over again on repeat. He'd known,
going in, that this was a possibility, but he never thought it would be so intense. He never thought
he'd be forced to remember…

"It's alright." He sighs and tries to comfort him as best he could. "It's a recess now. The hardest part
is over."

After a few more deep breaths to make the world stop spinning, Sasuke shakes his head. "No, it's
just getting started." Maybe that was all he'd have to say about his stay in that hell hole for today,
but it was going to come up again. And again…and again…"Itachi, I…I there's things…things he
did that I just…I can't…"

"Just tell them what's relevant to the case." Itachi didn't know what to say other than that. "You can
do it. You survived all that, you can handle talking about the bare necessities." Because he had to.
For the sake of the other children that creep had abducted.

Sometimes, Sasuke really wished he hadn't. "…I know. Just the basics…the murders…I don't have
to talk about being his pet." He closes his eyes, trying to will every image away. "…You saw some
of the things he did, didn't you? When you looked into the memories of that place."

"I saw enough and no, you don't." He shakes his head. "That's not relevant to the case."
"Not relevant…good." On his next breath, Sasuke inhales the scent of mint, clove, and bergamot, taking some comfort in the familiarity of Itachi's scent. "You smell good."

He smiles at that. "Good. I'm glad you think so." At least he could provide Sasuke with some small measure of comfort.

Bringing up the rear was Shisui, who'd let Itachi go on ahead for a moment alone with Sasuke. Or, as alone as they could be with a couple of lawyers glaring at their cousin. "Itachi, it's almost time for our first round of testifying." He puts his hand on his cousin's shoulder as a show of calm composure, what they would need when they each said their piece. "Are you ready?"

Itachi nods and looks at Sasuke apologetically. "I'm sorry, but I have to go." With a last small embrace, he follows Shisui to the box reserved for the 'experts' that the defense and prosecution could call in.

Unsurprisingly, there were a few others in the box, members of their department whose specialties ranged from autopsy to ballistics, virtual tracking to antique weaponry. Shisui was sitting in as lead on the case, and Itachi's role was as forensic psychologist, a role that Shisui was worried that Itachi would have trouble speaking about, since it concerned Sasuke's psyche.

"Your findings therefore allege that the killer is forming contracts with antagonistic parties in order to visit a fatal revenge upon these victims?" For as long as she could remember, Koharu Utatane had favored a slightly more suggestive approach than her counterpart in Mitokado, but she found it was an approach that served her well, even into her golden years.

"With antagonized parties who become antagonistic in their own right, yes." Shisui levels a stern gaze on her. "Our investigations have turned up unsolved or poorly solved crimes in many of the cases, with others still pending."

"And you allege that there is an information source that is pointing the killer towards his victims? What does this information source consist of." She had her suspicions, based on the abilities found within the Uchiha family. And so long as she could drag it out, she could tie the noose around the neck of the vicious criminal who killed Danzo.

Shisui narrows his eyes slightly. "The details of that part of the case are best discussed with my colleague, Agent Itachi Uchiha. It was he who questioned the defendant regarding how he acquired his information."

"I see…" She frowns slightly. No matter, she would simply have to get it out of the other Uchiha. "Your Honor, I request a change in witnesses."

Sarutobi nods. "Agent Uchiha, please leave the stand. Agent…Uchiha, please take the stand." Honestly, there were far too many Uchihas affiliated with the CIA.

Itachi leaves the box and quickly strides across the courtroom to take the stand, brushing past Shisui on his way. He tries his best not to glare at the elderly woman. It was difficult, but Itachi was reasonably confident that he had managed.

Counselor Utatane steps towards the stand, eyeing Itachi carefully. "Agent Itachi Uchiha, you are a specialist in forensic psychology, are you not?"

"I am." He barely refrains from saying, 'Idiot.'
"Very good, then please continue where your cousin left off concerning the source of information for the killer's crimes." Perhaps Danzo's murder was personal, but all of the others? There is no chance that he would know each and every person on that extremely extensive list. "What did this information source consist of that led the killer to his long list of victims?"

"Sasuke is gifted like most of his family." Itachi sighs as though fighting an oncoming migraine. "That's why Orochimaru wanted him in the first place. He can speak to the dead."

Silence rings through the courtroom at Itachi's words. If a pin dropped, it would sound like a clap of thunder. "The killer can speak to the dead?" Koharu raises an eyebrow. "That's quite the claim he makes. And why does he believe that he can speak with the dead?"

"He doesn't believe it." Itachi rolls his eyes at her. "He knows it. Why else do you think his victim list was so spread out and so varied with few signs of connections?"

"Opportunity, perhaps. The vast majority of his crimes were committed in this country, with several outliers, yes, but many worked in politics and business, they were upstanding citizens and pillars of their nations' economies and institutions." She paces gracefully across the courtroom floor. "Even if he can commune with these spirits, as you claim, this does not create valid motive beyond his own desire to kill, as individuals in death do not possess the same foundation of legal rights that living citizens possess. It is comparable to the claim of a god forcing one to commit murder. Please, agent, what is your professional evaluation of the claim that another entity can coerce or convince a living being into committing murder?"

"I'm sure that once you have a chance to see what those 'upstanding citizens' got up to when they thought no one was looking, you'll understand why he saved far more lives than he took." He would ensure that she would suffer by the end of all this. She would die screaming.

Her eyes narrow slightly. If she wasn't careful, she could lose the jury's sympathy to the killer. "So then, you believe that his claim to speak to the dead is true, and therefore that his crimes follow a pattern discernible only to him. That does not account for the sheer brutality of some of these murders. Many of the victims suffered greatly before their death, and several of the victims were torn apart, their remains nearly unidentifiable. This is not a comic book, and this sort of brutal vigilantism is unacceptable. Even IF some of his victims were of suspect character, why should his actions be exempted from the rule of law?"

"Because the system FAILED to do it's job in those cases." He doesn't bother to hide the contempt from his eyes. "I do hope that you'll look over the truth when this case is done and the jury will do the same. Then get back to me on whether or not his brutality level was acceptable." Itachi wouldn't lie. "The acts he did were vicious, but that is why they call them 'crimes' of passion. I suppose that you think that if someone is about to sell a child into slavery or murder someone, you would tap them on the back and ask them very politely to stop. That isn't how the real world works." He glances at them. "The courtroom is a sterile environment, but the truth doesn't give a damn about your delicate sensibilities. His real crime is simply caring too much and not being 'gentle' enough in the face of evil."

Sasuke's eyes widen, staring in disbelief at the eloquent and impassioned speech. He'd NEVER had someone defend him like this, not even Gaara. And it..helped to alleviate some of the heaviness on his conscience, which he would never admit was guilt. Itachi...despite all logic and decorum, was refusing to wash his hands of Sasuke. He refused to back down, even when Sasuke was prepared to pay whatever price was asked of him. And the woman who looked like she had swallowed a lemon could go to hell because if Itachi was so determined...then maybe he might just survive this. Maybe he could help Itachi and Shisui's new crusade after all. He sighs, his eyes were softening at the
sight of his soulmate's inflamed passion. "Itachi..."

Itachi could feel Sasuke's response, but he couldn't respond to it directly. Only hope that Sasuke knew he had 'heard' him as he glowers at the woman. DARING her to continue speaking. As if he truly thought she might spontaneously combust from him glaring at her enough. Sadly, thus far his efforts had been unsuccessful, but if it happened he would say it was an Act of God and build a shrine on the spot the bitch kicked the bucket.

Anger glows in ancient eyes, peering out of her unpleasantly weathered face. "I see. I have no more questions for this witness at this time, Your Honor." But this was not over. There were other witnesses, other experts. And all the Uchiha had truly done was defend his relative's honor, not his innocence. His guilt was not in question, and she would have to remind the jury of that.
Chapter 19

Chapter by celestia193

celestia193’s Author's Note: Enjoy the happiness while it lasts. Because I look forward to ripping more hearts out.

For the first time in weeks, years, really, Sasuke felt refreshed and alert after a good night’s sleep. According to the time on the computer, he’d slept for nearly twelve hours. He hadn't slept that much on his own since he was a kid. He Was still locked up in a cell, but he felt...good.

He felt even better once he got into his computer files and started on yet another long day of writing. Over three hundred thousand words in, and there was still so much for him to write about. Forget writing one book about everything he knew, he was writing a damn series. Itachi Had given him a chance to prove himself, and he was going to do it and make his soulmate proud.

A few hours in, the lock on the door clicks open, and it swings ajar slightly, drawing Sasuke's attention away from the screens. A smile curls his lips, dark eyes softening at the sight of his visitor who had come bearing a tray laden with food enough for two people. "Itachi..."

Itachi comes inside and despite the situation, finds himself smiling at Sasuke. "You look happy." Maybe Sasuke sincerely thought they would get him off death row the traditional way.

"Well, I have you, food, and a decent start on the next installment in my non-fiction crime and horror series." Sasuke smirks at his own joke. "And now that I can get the lights mostly turned down at night, I'm sleeping better." Not to mention the great help that Itachi was in lulling him to sleep. And getting him an actual pillow and blanket to use.

He had to be the most...content man that Itachi had ever seen on trial for murder. It was painful to know that he would lose the case, even if there was a decent chance they could save him. He pushes these thoughts aside for the moment though. Sasuke needed him. That was what mattered most. "Good." He smiles as he walks over to him and kisses Sasuke's forehead. "I'm glad."

Sasuke sighs softly, leaning into Itachi's gentle touch. "So, what did you bring me today?" It was always something of a surprise, and Sasuke was pretty sure that of any inmate ever tried for murder, he was definitely the most well-fed. In fact, he was pretty sure that Itachi made the meals himself and brought them in, rather than just feeding him the standard fare.

"A red velvet cake," Itachi smirks at him. "I'm not sure you've ever had one."

"No, I haven't. But...you brought me cake?" That was odd. Itachi usually brought him healthy food, not that Sasuke complained at all. It was how Itachi had discovered precisely what Sasuke's favorite fruit was. "...Wait, what day is it?" The days kind of blurred together here, but Sasuke was pretty sure it was July...

"The twenty-third." Itachi smiles at him. "I figured that you should have a cake, but you seem adverse to all things sweet, sugary, and frosting-like."
A soft chuckle escapes Sasuke's lips. "I guess you're right about that." He hated anything too sweet with a passion. Everything but Itachi, anyway. And it was gestures like this that exposed his soulmate's sweet side. "Well, I guess if you went to all the effort of getting a bearable cake for me..." He sniffs the air, a wry smirk quirking his lips. "Cream cheese icing?"

"I had to get some kind of icing." He chuckles.

"Of course you did." Sasuke sets aside the computer for now, the screen still displaying the latest 'chapter' of his work. "So I take it that you've got a sweet tooth?"

"I indulge occasionally." He smiles as he kisses Sasuke. "I've got nothing on Shisui in that regard though."

"Mm...maybe." Sasuke leans into the kiss, tasting a faint hint of coffee on Itachi's tongue, along with a hit of cream and sugar.

Itachi deepens the kiss and runs his fingers through Sasuke's hair. In moments like this, he could almost pretend that his soulmate wasn't on trial for murder and facing death row.

Sasuke purrs softly as the gentle fingers rub through his hair, touching all of the sensitive places around the back of his head. "You're really good at this..."

"I like to think that I'm really good at many things." Itachi smiles at his intended seductively. A spark of heat flashes through Sasuke, Itachi's words dripping with promise. "I bet you are." But this was definitely not the time to be getting well acquainted with each other. And it definitely wasn't the most romantic, either. Still, Sasuke appreciated Itachi's efforts, nonetheless. There were just a lot of things that Sasuke didn't want to think about right now. "Why don't we have some of that cake you brought, and you can tell me about that time when you were in the seventh grade and you ended up pelted with water balloons filled with paint when you walked through a fifth grade class's art project."

"That's right." Itachi smirks at the compliment. Puffing up a bit like a peacock. "Wait." He blinks. "How do you know about that incident?" It was one that he tried so very hard to forget. It was hardly his finest moment.

Sasuke smirks as he takes a pre-sliced piece of cake and a plastic fork. "Shisui told me when he checked in on me a couple of days ago. He also told me that he's the one who helped you wash it all off."

"He can be such a bastard sometimes." Itachi shakes his head as he begins eating with his beloved. Hm...this red velvet cake was actually pretty good. It wasn't so sweet that Sasuke's tastebuds felt overwhelmed, but it was rich, and the icing was creamy. "He also told me about the time you 'made friends' with a family of pandas at the zoo. Something about a couple of kids accidentally pushing you over the railing no into the enclosure?"

"I might accidentally shove him into a carnivore exhibit at this rate." Itachi rolls his eyes. "Honestly."

"Hey, at least they're funny stories. And it's not like snuggling with baby pandas hurt you." Sasuke's dark eyes gleam brightly with humor. "Besides, it's nice to hear stories about the things you did when you were a kid. And it's not like you're a fountain of story-telling. so of course I have to get my stories somewhere else."
"Oh yes, you've been horribly deprived of hearing about my most mortifying experiences." Itachi shakes his head in amusement.

"Those are the funniest ones." Sasuke felt like that should be a given. The most embarrassing stories were always the ones most worth hearing. "But fine, if you don't want to tell me anything embarrassing, what other stories have you got?" He takes another bite of cake, humming softly as it goes down without a fight.

"Well, there was the time when a friend of mine hadn't done his homework the night before and the teacher called on him." Itachi smiles. "He was never academically gifted and the teacher despised him. Imagine his surprise when my friend suddenly began speaking perfect French because I broadcasted it to him telepathically."

Sasuke raises an eyebrow quizzically. "Seriously? You spoke French into your friend's head during class?" Well...that might open up a whole new avenue to explore. Maybe. "Does that technically count as cheating? Or was the teacher an asshole who deserved it?"

"I don't think it counts as cheating." he chuckles. "There were no rules against using magic in class. I don't think they ever thought of the possibility and he deserved it."

In that case, it served them right for being unprepared for having psychics in classrooms. "So, you went to university, right?" Shisui had told Sasuke something about Itachi having specialized in forensic psychology "What's that like, anyway?"

"It varies for everyone." He smiles. "I liked it though. Obviously or else I wouldn't have a doctorate."

Nodding his head slightly, Sasuke leans against Itachi's shoulder, trying to imagine walking cross a campus. He'd seen campuses before, obviously, but going to school had never been an option. "So what are you going to do, then? After you resign, I mean. Are you going to go back to school and specialize in something else, or are you going to become a shrink or something?"

"Oh I imagine I'll be very busy with my new more creative endeavors." Far more satisfying ones.

Right, Sasuke had almost forgotten about Itachi's other plans. "Then maybe you should go into creative writing, or journalism. I bet you'd be able to write a lot of important stories."

"I suppose you could say that I'm considering those fields in a way." He was going to expose them of course. Itachi was going to be sure that every last criminal on Sasuke's list was exposed.

Sasuke nods slowly and closes his eyes. "And after that? What do you think you'll do?"

"I haven't thought that far ahead yet." itachi shakes his head. "I'm taking this one day at a time."

"Yeah, I get it." It was how Sasuke had lived most of his life, after all. But he didn't want to bring the mood down any more, not when Itachi had gone through all the trouble to bring him cake for his birthday. So, he puts down his now empty plate and slides into Itachi's lap, resting his head in the crook of Itachi's neck. "So, cats or dogs?"

"Cats" He chuckles at the question. "I do like dogs, but I'm more of a cat person." He always had been. It was probably because he was more of an introvert.

Sasuke smirks at Itachi's choice. "Hm...that makes sense. Cats can be total assholes most of the time. They hiss if you try to pet them, always wander off on their own, scratch up everything they can find." Just like him.
"I suppose you could say that." Itachi smiles and wraps his arms gently around Sasuke's smaller form.

A soft sigh wafts Sasuke's warm breath across Itachi's skin. "...Thanks for the cake. It's...been a long time since I last did anything on my birthday."

Itachi kisses him. "I know." He wanted to make this one special, no matter what happened. Sasuke deserved at least that much.

"Though I guess it's as good a reason as any to be slacking off for a little while." Sasuke smirks softly at the computer laying off to the side. "I got a lot done for you. I think I'm a bit more than halfway there now." And he'd been pushing as hard as he could, all to help Itachi.

"Well, that's something." He caresses Sasuke's cheek. "One day won't hurt you, if you've made that much progress."

"One day, huh?" Sasuke smiles teasingly, wrapping his arms around Itachi's neck. "What could you possibly want with me for an entire day?"

"I want far more than that, but I'll take what I can get." Which would be everything, if Itachi had his way.

Dark eyes widen slightly, then Sasuke presses a heated kiss to his soulmate's lips. They only had a little time in the grand scheme of things, and maybe indulging was a bad idea, but Sasuke would also take what he could get.

It wasn't surprising in the least that the day he spent with Itachi for his birthday was a singularly stress-free reprieve from the grueling procedures of the trial. His soulmate had been kind enough to give him that, at least. Maybe he should have taken it as an omen.

The trial had been long, drawn out, and extremely stressful. While Sasuke hadn't had to go to court every single day, and in fact he was kept locked up more often than not, it still hadn't been fun to be interrogated in front of an audience by prosecutors who just wanted to tear apart everything he did. He wasn't insane, though maybe he was a bit deranged. But everything he did had a purpose.

But that didn't matter. He had Itachi coming in most days to bring him food and stay to talk to him for a little while. And when he couldn't, it was Shisui's turn. And when both of them had to be in court on the same day, His mother would come and sit with him. She would tell him stories that she remembered from when he was a kid, still bright-eyed and excitable. It was nice, it made him feel normal for a little while.

And of course, there were many hours that he spent alone, typing away and adding tens of thousands of words to the many documents that he was working on. And one by one, he'd finished each and every one, save this last one that still required a few final finishing touches.

It felt like every word he added increased someone else's chances just a little bit. Every sentence, every paragraph mattered. Every little detail he could squeeze in could get someone saved a little faster, reduce a little of the damage, maybe even prevent it in the first place. It felt...right to be doing this. This way, Sasuke could make a bigger difference in others' lives. And he didn't even need to pick up a blade to do it.

As he types out the last few sentences, he hears the lock on the door click, and he turns his head to
see familiar dark eyes as Itachi enters the room. "Hey, Itachi. Nice timing. I'm just finishing up now." His fingers go back to working, getting out the last few words that this topic needed.

"I'll let you finish first." Itachi walks over to him. "Take your time." This was the hardest thing that he had ever had to do. 'Lie' to Sasuke's face. Well, it wasn't a technical lie. Sasuke had been sentenced to the death penalty. Itachi just couldn't tell him that had been 'on purpose'. And he definitely couldn't tell him about the second part of their plan. He wanted to, but there were simply too many cameras and listening ears around to risk it. There was also no guarantee...

"Alright. I should be done..." Sasuke's fingers fly about, typing up the last of nearly six hundred thousand words. "Now." He hit the last period, then hit save, and all was finally done. "There, now the CIA and FBI and police can all get off their asses and actually do something productive for once." Hell, at this point, they might as well call in the military as well. It's not like there was a shortage of work that needed doing here.

"Maybe." Itachi sighs as he looks at Sasuke. "One can only hope." How would he really take this news? He had seemed so hopeful of late. Itachi didn't want to take that from him, but someone would tell him.

"Yeah, I guess." Sasuke dolls his eyes, then directs his gaze to Itachi as he shuts down the computer and sets it on the floor. "So, are you finally going to tell me what happened with the Koala bear and the..." He frowns. Something seemed...off about Itachi today. And he was getting a weird sense of regret coming through their connection, even with Itachi dampening his emotions, as usual.

"I'll tell you whatever you want to know." Not that it made a difference now.

Sasuke grows quiet, the thought of hearing the continuation of another of Shisui's funny stories about Itachi flying far away. "...Something happened, didn't it?"

He sighs and crosses his arms. "Yes, the verdict came." There was no getting around it. "We lost the case."

Sasuke's heart thuds painfully in his chest and he shrinks in on himself, casting his eyes to the floor as he takes in the news. He hadn't expected to win and get off scot-free, of course. But the way Itachi was looking at him...the once bright hope that his soulmate had rekindled in him was steadily shrinking. "...How badly...?" As if he needed to ask...

"You're to be put to death, but we will see to it that it is done humanely." He sighs. "Perhaps one day I'll be able to forgive you for abandoning me for justice for the likes of Orochimaru and Danzo and you'll be able to forgive me for everything else."

It was an echo of words said once before, when Sasuke had convinced himself that the only way this was going to end was with his death. It looked like he was right. "Hn." He smiles wryly, his eyes emptying and growing cold. "I guess this means it's time to pay my dues. I stuck to my convictions and made my choices, and now I'll die for them." The last flickers of hope faded, leaving him feeling as cold as a January snowstorm.

"If you have your way, I get to die with you." Itachi had played his part well in the courtroom, but that comment was a bridge too far. "The only difference is my heart regrettaably keeps beating." They would try to bring him back, but Itachi had no way of knowing with a hundred percent certainty it would work. Even a 99% chance still left room for error.

The harsh comment fell on Sasuke like a lead weight. It felt like an ultimatum, except that there
was nothing more he could do. He couldn't even make a choice anymore. "...Do you believe in
reincarnation, Itachi?"

"I haven't ruled out the possibility." He glances at Sasuke. "Though it's a moot point for quite
awhile in my case."

That was fair, he supposed, though it still felt like a dagger to Sasuke's heart. But he deserved it. He
deserved all of Itachi's resentment, all of his anger, all of his hatred... "I'd like to. ...If I could, I'd
like to be a cat. They've got nine lives, after all." And Itachi liked cats well enough. So
maybe...maybe they'd see each other again someday...

"Maybe." He sighs. "I hope we will. I shall be there for your execution at the very least."

That was an exercise in masochism, if Sasuke had ever heard one. He wanted to say that Itachi
shouldn't be there. That he didn't want Itachi too have to watch him die. That he didn't want Itachi
to have to remember something like that. Because he knew how it felt to watch someone die. He'd
seen it so many times... But it was a comfort, if only a small one. "Thank you...and...I'm sorry,
Itachi. If we had met before all of this, then maybe...maybe it could have worked out." If they
erased more than half of his past, or invented a time machine to prevent his abduction, maybe...

"Maybe we'll have better luck next time." Itachi leans down and kisses Sasuke's forehead. "If there
is a next time, don't choose those scum over me."

"Yeah..." Sasuke sighs and buries his face in his knees, his cheeks growing damp as he closes his
eyes.

"You didn't have to do any of this." Itachi looks at him. "You made the wrong choice this time, but
I'll do what I can to...make it as painless as possible."

Sasuke barely heard him. He nods some sort of assent, before withdrawing all of his thoughts, and
what few emotions he could still feel at all into a tiny shell deep inside his frozen heart.

"I should probably go." Itachi sighs, then catches sight of the computer resting in front of Sasuke.
At the very least, he could get all of the files downloaded and sent out to the team Shisui was
covertly assembling.

The door quietly slid shut, both Itachi and the computer disappearing from Sasuke's presence. He
was alone again. Completely alone.
Chapter 20

Chapter by celestia193

Chapter Notes

celestia193’s Author's Note: As an important side-note, executions do not happen nearly this quickly under even the least complicated circumstances (at least in the states in present day). However, it should be noted that there are no appeals being made, and that a lot of the slowdown in executions today comes from the appeals process, as well as the controversy over lethal injections, neither of which are a factor here, hence the speed of the case. The average wait is about 15 years on death row, with the shortest timeframe at six months. We are shortening that considerably because…let's be honest, they'll probably become more efficient with this process a couple of centuries into the future.

I have no regrets about breaking your hearts.

It had been a month, by Sasuke’s reckoning, since Itachi had delivered the news. It scared him as much as it relieved him. On the one hand, he hadn't cried once since then, scared for Itachi’s future. But on the other hand, it was a lonely place to be locked in, waiting for his death, without the comfort his soulmate could provide.

His death that…for some reason was still being debated. The last he'd heard of his fate, they were still arguing over the method of execution. He didn't really see much difference between one way or another. But all of this waiting was eroding what little sanity he still had.

Of course, a small dose of sanity was due to come walking through that door any minute now, as she had done every day since he'd been sentenced, the hearing that had happened a week after the trial ended. Itachi had been there, but he hadn't said a word to Sasuke. Sasuke didn't blame him. He wouldn't have known what to say either.

Still, he'd taken this month to continue his work, just as he had during the weeks of the trial. Even if he would soon pass on, he could leave behind his knowledge for Shisui to use. Hundreds of thousands of words later, Sasuke was sure that he’d gotten everything down that needed to be written. The rest could be figured out through connections in the investigations.

He was going down, but he was going to make sure his fight kept going, even if it was through more legal channels now.

The door to his cell opens a crack, a familiar figure slipping inside. One he'd been waiting for all afternoon. He smiles warmly. "Hey, Mom." She’d come to him every single day, letting him lay his head in her lap and playing with his hair as she told him stories and jokes…he would tell some back and she would scold him for doing something reckless, even if it had happened years ago. It was…nice, for however long he had left to enjoy it.

"Hey." She smiles back, still amazed at how well he was taking his impending doom. "How are you feeling?" Well as far as he knew anyway. It killed her not to tell him, but it was the only way that she could protect him and this time she wouldn't fail him in that capacity.
"Bored?" He tries to keep the smile present, but he could feel it slipping some. "It's still hard to sleep, so I spend most of my time writing. Or thinking." He moves over, vacating her usual space along the wall.

"Well, I suppose that's not such a bad thing." She quickly assumes her spot. "It all depends on what you're thinking about." He didn't show any signs of terror or anger at the moment and that was hard for her to swallow. Mostly because she knew what that meant. Sasuke had made his peace with this to some extent years ago.

He chuckles softly as he lays his head in her lap. "I preferred the writing, I used it to try and avoid thinking. My mind tends to wander to dark places." But not when she was here. Never when she was here.

She runs her fingers through his hair. Mikoto had figured out that was the best way to soothe him. How she wished she could tell him the truth about everything, but she couldn't. "I can understand that." She smiles. "Well, it seems you missed out on your calling as a novelist."

"Hm…maybe in my next life, I'll do just that." Sasuke's smile fades, but he remains where he is, enjoying the fingers running through his hair. "Do you really think I'd be good at it?"

"I think that if things had turned out differently, you could have done any career you set your mind to." She smiles at him. "You are an Uchiha after all."

Another pathetic chuckles drops from his lips. "Yeah…I'm a failure of an Uchiha, aren't I? Only got my middle and high school education because a vampire made me. Decided to become a serial killer instead of going to university."

She shakes her head. "You didn't fail." Mikoto continues threading her figures through his hair affectionately. "Sasuke, you're going to save so many lives with the things you wrote. That's far more important than a college diploma."

"I suppose so." Not that he was going to be around to make sure it all got looked over. "Make sure you breathe down Shisui's neck for me. He wanted the information, so he'd better look into every single word, or I swear I'll haunt him forever."

Mikoto laughs and nods in response. Trying her best to play the part assigned to her. It wasn't hard. She had lost him once and if things didn't go perfectly, she might lose him again. "I'll make sure he makes good use of that." She kisses his forehead. "You have my word on that."

He opens his eyes, staring serenely up at her. "Thank you." His eyes mist over so he closes them once more. "Are you…going to forget me this time?" It would be less painful for her if she did, but the idea wrenched at Sasuke's heart.

"Sasuke, we never forgot about you." She frowns. "We truly thought you were dead. That doesn't mean we forgot you. We never would."

"But…this time, I really will be." Though he still smiles anyway. "Sorry, it's stupid. I just didn't want to be…" He swallows thickly. "I just don't want it to be like I never existed."

The poor thing. If only she could tell him the truth, then he would feel better. Though it had to be realistic. "It won't be." She sighs as she struggles to find the words. "I promise you that much, Sasuke."

"…Thank you." It's more than he deserved. "…I'm sorry…for believing the lies that man told me. For not looking for you after I was rescued from that hellhole." If he had, then maybe things
wouldn't have turned out like this.

"That wasn't your fault." Who could blame him after years of being conditioned and tortured? "What matters is that we're together now."

"…For now." Sasuke sighs, his eyes drifting towards the door as a polite knock echoes through the metal. "Yes?"

The door opens slowly, revealing Shisui this time, his face soft, but grim. "…Sasuke." His brow furrows slightly as it falls on the room's other occupant. "Mikoto."

It was too soon, but Mikoto knew the truth. She'd never fully be ready for what was about to happen. Her baby truly believed he was about to discover how he would die. "Do you want him to be tactful or straight to it?" She looks at Sasuke sympathetically. "Whatever is easiest for you."

Sasuke looks to his cousin, then pushes himself from his mother's lap, his bangs just brushing his shoulders as he sits up. "How? And when?"

Straight to the point, then. Shisui could respect that, even more so when he noted his little cousin's composure when faced with such difficult news. "Tomorrow morning, ten-thirty. They wanted to go by injection, but I pushed for asphyxiation by nitrogen instead. It should be just like falling asleep, you won't feel like you're choking. It'll be over in fifteen minutes, but you'll be asleep in less than half of that."

"…I see." That was considerably better than Sasuke was expecting. Then again, no one was executed by firing squad anymore, and even though injections had come a long way, he hadn't been looking forward to that. This seemed…almost peaceful.

Mikoto only half chokes back a sob. "Tomorrow?" It was so soon. "They don't waste any time once they've had their precious circus, do they?"

"No, they don't." Shisui would admit to that much. "Normally, there would be a waiting period of at least a few months, but since Sasuke isn't appealing the ruling…" Because of that, it was being carried out much faster than usual.

Sasuke nods, accepting the decision. "At least the waiting is almost over." It was just short of psychological torture to be kept waiting in here while his fate was finally decided.

"I assure you that Madara will be even more efficient with their complete destruction after this is over." Mikoto knew that much for a fact. "I'm so sorry, Sasuke." She sighs as she embraces him tightly.

"Yeah…I'm sure…" Sasuke pats his mother on the back, the news feeling more than a little unreal. It was…almost over. He'd just…fall asleep and never wake up. "Thank you for being here, but…you don't need to come watch."

"I need to be there for you, Sasuke." She shakes her head. "It's the least I can do. Had I done my job better as a parent, you wouldn't be here in the first place."

Shisui nods sadly. "I'll be there as well. I argued for the right to be there, to…help you pass on. Normally they wouldn't allow it but I convinced them otherwise."

His cousin…would be the one killing him. It was almost funny, in a morbid way. "I see." Sasuke takes a deep breath, then closes his eyes and sits back against the wall of his cell. "…I think…I need some time alone right now."
"Whatever you want." Mikoto sighs as she looks at him and tries to blink back the tears that wouldn't stop flowing. "If you need us, let us know."

Sasuke takes a deep breath and nods. "Yeah...I know." But right now, he just needed to absorb it. It didn't feel real. So he needed time to let it sink in. "Thank you, Shisui, for everything."

Despite knowing what he did, Shisui still felt a pang to his heart. That was it, then. The last of Sasuke's light was going out, his heart growing dark and quiet. His little cousin must have been in shock, because Shisui couldn't feel anything coming from Sasuke anymore. "Yeah. I'll come back in the morning. Try...try to get a little sleep."

"Yeah." Sasuke knew it was futile, but it didn't really matter in the end.

He was going to die, and that was it.

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Shisui would be lying if he said he'd gotten any sleep. The idea of what he was about to do was nerve-wracking. And never before had he felt someone's mind so utterly quiet. Even standing just on the other side of the door, when he reached out to touch Sasuke's mind, it was as though his spirit was already gone.

On the one hand, he hated feeling his cousin like this, and he hated that Itachi couldn't even properly comfort Sasuke about this. On the other hand, the little shit had brought this on himself when he turned himself in instead of running away. So maybe this would teach him a lesson in the future that even if you've got a guilty conscience, there are other ways to go about doing things.

But at least now he'd be able to hand Sasuke over to those vampires of his and hide him a bit more permanently. He chuckles darkly as he remember the conversation with Temari. And seeing as Sasuke was in rather dire need of a makeover soon, he was looking forward to seeing Sasuke's expression when the brat found out what he was in for.

Still, he schools his features and takes on a somber tone as he opens the door to the brightly lit cell. As expected, Sasuke looked like he hadn't slept at all. "...Sasuke. It's time."

Onyx eyes slowly look up at him, dark and empty. "...Right."

Shisui steps forward to help Sasuke to his feet, securing the cuffs around his wrists more as a matter of formality. He doubted Sasuke was even going to try to escape at this point. "Come on, everyone's waiting."

"Hn." Sasuke takes a mechanical step forward, following Shisui's every silent command obediently. He was about to die. And he no longer cared.

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The room was eerily quiet as the witnesses gathered along the edges of the room. Fugaku noted that in addition to the dark-haired lady doctor required by law to be here, the two fossilized prosecutors were both in attendance beside the warden of the state penitentiary. He also noticed the burning glares that Itachi levelled at them covertly. They had spent the entirety of the trial convincing the jury of the terrible monster that Sasuke was and dismissing all evidence that the people he murdered were criminals in their own right.
Beside him, weeping softly and putting on quite the show was his beautiful wife. Of course, there were many things to weep about, even if all of this went perfectly. But he rested his arm around her waist, holding her close to his heart as he and Madara watched the door. The elderly man would no doubt perform his task flawlessly, and one at a time, the pieces would fall into place just as soon as Sasuke stepped through that door.

Plotting their complete destruction was the only way that Itachi was getting through at the moment. He knew in theory what would happen, but in practice he didn't. So for now, he settle on glaring and looking anywhere but at the grieving mother.

The murderous intent coming from more than one Uchiha was thick in the air. Let it never be said that their family did not love and hate in equal measure, because this day was proof of that. Even Madara was glaring sternly at the two who were aiding in causing his son such pain. Were it not for their kind, Danzo's kind...Sasuke might never have suffered to this extent, never gone down this path. And while the boy certainly bore some of the blame for this, it was clearly not all of his own making.

Not that it mattered now as the door slides open, revealing their little murderer, escorted into the room by his older cousin. Most disturbing to both fathers in the room was the listless expression on the boy's face and the emptiness of his eyes.

"Get this over with. You've got slave traders and child abusers to avenge." Itachi literally spits at the prosecutors. "I know how important that is to you."

Both prosecutors glare at him, but neither choose to dignify the accusation with a response. The doctor bites her lip, not at all happy to be here, but her services had been 'requested' by the state, and she'd been in little position to refuse. "Yes...we'll proceed now." She glances at Shisui, nodding towards the table.

Mikoto sighs as she embraces Sasuke. "It's going to be okay." She kisses his forehead. "Just remember that we love you."

Sasuke doesn't resist at all, giving his mother the chance to embrace and kiss him one last time. To him, the prosecutors didn't even matter now. He'd made his bed. "...I'm sorry." He was going to destroy her happiness all over again. He'd never meant for her to know, to find out. But somehow, all of his plans had come to nothing.

She shakes her head quickly. He'd live, but Sasuke didn't know that. If anything, she should be the one apologizing to him. "You have nothing to apologize for and I'm sure your father agrees with me." She sighs and hugs him tightly. "We love you. Never forget that."

Then she glares at the prosecutors. "I hope you live long lives, so every day you can think about the fact that in Hell, your job descriptions won't protect you from getting exactly what you deserve. May the souls of every last one of those children that died because of people like you haunt you every day for the rest of your pathetic existences."

Piercing, merciless eyes fall on Mikoto, and Counsellor Utatane's lips curve into a terrible frown. "Hold your tongue when you know nothing. This criminal's fate is of his own making, and blaming us in ignorance for the supposed crimes of those he killed will neither erase his, nor bring back whatever children were lost."

"You can tell that to the devil himself. He doesn't give a damn about your excuses, bitch." She hisses at her. "You can tell it to the spirits that will no doubt haunt you as well. For once in your wretched life, someone is going to tell you the truth. That you're scum. Your idols got their money
and power on the corpses of innocent children. You the real murderer. You and your prehistoric fossil of a partner."

Mitokado glances at the doctor, then at Shisui. "As much as I am loathed to agree with the Uchiha on anything, getting this over with quickly would be advised." He glances at Utatane. "She is trying to bait you and you're falling for it. Our emotions mean nothing when administering justice."

"Tell yourself that at night." Madara smirks. "Because you know she's right."

Seeing that this is all starting to spiral out of control, Shisui steps in to put a lid on all of it. He needed to shut up both the prosecutors and his own family. His eyes flash a brilliant scarlet as he stares at each of his arguing elders. "Enough. This childish bickering serves no purpose except to cause Sasuke more anxiety." And he really didn't want his little cousin damaged more than necessary. Though he was growing worried that it might be worse than even he had anticipated.

The old woman glares sourly, but silences herself, her eyes now focused on the young man next to the cold steel table. And much to Shisui's relief, she was not the only one to grow silent at his reprimand.

Anxious he might be, but to Sasuke, it's almost a relief when Shisui puts a strong hand on his shoulder. "Sasuke...it's time." Almost...

Sasuke takes a deep breath, stepping away from his mother and turning towards the cold-looking table set up in the middle of the room. Following Shisui's motions, he sits on the table and holds his hands out, allowing Shisui to fiddle with the restraints and separate them.

Shisui glances up at him, then gently presses Sasuke's shoulders back to lay him on the metal slab. "You'll be restrained, but it's only a technicality." He knew that Sasuke wasn't going to try escaping now.

"Okay." Sasuke lets his arms go limp as Shisui takes them one at a time, fixing the metal restraints to magnetic indents in the table. He tests one and finds that he can't get it free. The other behaves exactly the same. Finally, he looks up from the table and towards Itachi, his breath quickening a little at the sight of Itachi's face.

Itachi looks at him, blinking rapidly. But it didn't work, there were still silent tears streaming down his face. "I'm sorry." For everything. If this didn't work, he would have put Sasuke's parents through even more unnecessary pain and if it did, Sasuke might never forgive him for not respecting his wishes.

Sasuke bites his lip as he watches Shisui pick up a clear mask out of the corner of his eye, but doesn't make a single sound of protest as his cousin approaches the table with it. He simply turns away from Itachi, focusing on the mask as it comes ever closer.

Shisui rolls a little tank over beside the table, filled with enough gas to put Sasuke out in a matter of minutes. "Are you ready?"

Taking a deep breath, his last breath of oxygen, Sasuke nods. "Yes."

"...Is there anything you'd like to say?" Shisui figured he could at least make a show of it.

For a moment, Sasuke didn't feel like there was much to say. But before letting Shisui go ahead, he looks back to Itachi and smiles sadly. "It's not your fault. It was never your fault..." Then he sighs and looks up into Shisui's eyes.
Recognizing it for what it was, Shisui obeys the signal and gently presses the mask to Sasuke's face, securing elastic straps around his ears. "Just breathe, you'll barely feel a thing."

With a small nod, Sasuke breathes, and it was true, he really didn't feel a thing. At least, not for the first few breaths. It was only after about a dozen that he could feel that he wasn't taking in any oxygen, but it didn't hurt. At least not physically. But even though he was prepared for this, ready to accept his fate, a dark hole opened in his heart to expel all of the sadness and fear that even he couldn't hide away.

It was worse than Itachi imagined. Mikoto was wrong. Those two wouldn't live long enough to die of old age. Destroying their reputations wasn't enough. He would destroy them period.

Sasuke takes in a few more breaths, trying to tamp down his fear. But his heart was pounding, and every bit of fear he threw away was replaced by a gaping darkness. He was dying. And only now did it truly feel real. He was dying, and he was alone. Strapped to a table and helpless, just like he'd been back then. Restrained and alone...all alone... He gasps, and the stuttering of his breath couldn't be passed off as caused by the gas as tears mist over his eyes and blur his vision slightly. Tears spill over, and Sasuke felt sleepy...he wanted Itachi. He just...wanted his soulmate by his side one last time. "Ita...Itachi..." He wanted something to fill his lonely heart with, just...just for a minute.

Itachi steps up to the table and kisses Sasuke's forehead gently. He wasn't even sure if Sasuke was coherent enough to feel it, but he does anyway. Trying to ease his passing.

Barely conscious, Sasuke's fingers twitch towards Itachi's hand, his wrists held in place by the magnetic restraints. "P-please..." He just...needed Itachi. His heart was breaking, and he needed someone who could push away the utter desolation there.

Itachi laces their fingers together, trying to comfort his love as best he could. "It's alright, Sasuke." He presses another kiss to his forehead. "You don't have to fight and suffer anymore."

Sasuke nods lethargically, barely able to keep his eyes open anymore. Itachi...Itachi was with him, everything would be okay as long as Itachi was with him. No matter how lonely he felt, or how many tears leaked from his eyes...Itachi would make it all better. That's why he loved him so much. That's why he loved...Itachi...

Shisui moves back towards the table as Sasuke's eyes slide shut, wiping at the tears on his face. He'd gone into this, hoping that he would be able to act convincingly but...he no longer had any worries about that. Sasuke's emotions as his consciousness faded were so strong that Shisui couldn't help the tears that dripped down his own cheeks.

The plan was working, the potion was in effect. And Shisui knew what he would have to do for Sasuke after this.

"My aunt is right about one thing." Itachi watches as Sasuke's body goes limp, not even bothering to look at them. "You're both going to Hell one day and no amount of money will change that."

"Some evils can be forgiven, but there are some that simply can't." Shisui echoes the sentiment as he placed a hand on Sasuke's chest, feeling carefully as his little cousin's heartbeat slowed and his breathing became increasingly shallow over the next five minutes. Then finally, Sasuke moved no more.

That was it, then. The potion had worked. At least, so he hoped.
Shizune steps forward, truly hating this part of her job. She'd never overseen an execution before, and now she knew that if she was ever asked again, even at the threat of her medical licence being revoked, she would turn them down flat. She takes Shisui's place as he backs away, her fingers pressing to Sasuke's neck, then her ear to his chest and over his mouth. She takes a few minutes, just to be sure. "...Sasuke Uchiha, time of death is 10:44 AM." And this boy was clearly too young to die, to have suffered his life. But...at least he wouldn't suffer anymore.

"You may as well leave." Madara looks at Shizune. "His blood isn't on your hands." He looks at the prosecutors. "They merely had you do their dirty work. If you need it, I can recommend a good therapist.

Shizune sighs and takes a step back. "Thank you for the gesture, but I assure you that my boss has likely already arranged it with our on-staff psychiatrists." She glances at the two young men on either side of the table. Perhaps she should recommend therapy for the two of them as well. It looked like they would need it.

Itachi strides from the room, making sure to bump the two prosecutors hard enough to send a message as he does, but just lightly enough to avoid bruising their sorry asses. He had to be seen leaving and so did the others. Besides, if he stayed any longer, he wouldn't be composed enough to do what needed to be done.
Chapter 21

Chapter by celestia193

It took about half an hour for Madara to have Sasuke's body released, and Shizune even agreed to spare a body bag so that they could take him home with some semblance of dignity. It wasn't particularly difficult, after all no one wanted to deal with an autopsy when religious objections were cited. Too much hassle.

Shisui got into the passenger's seat of Madara's hummer. It was the old man's utility vehicle when one of his other cars wouldn't fit the bill. He would have driven himself home, but he handed his own keys off to Fugaku and Mikoto, knowing that neither he, nor Itachi were in any shape to drive right now. As the only psychics in the room who could pick up on emotions like that, he knew that Itachi had to be as much, if not even more of a wreck than he was.

He glances into the back seat where Itachi sits crouched next to the shiny black bag containing Sasuke's body. Very rarely did he see Itachi cry over anything, but today had been a hard day for all of them, especially his cousins. But, he could offer some solace, at least. "He should have a pulse again in about five and a half hours, but he shouldn't wake up until tomorrow morning, so we'll have a buffer period to get ready for that." And Shisui wasn't going to think about what might happen on the microscopic chance that this didn't work. Because it was going to, there was no other option.

Itachi merely nods. He didn't really trust himself to speak at the moment. The younger Uchiha sighs as he gazes down at the 'dead' Uchiha.

Sasuke's face was as pale as moonlight, his skin cool, but not cold, his features relaxed as if he was merely sleeping. All that was missing was the steady beating of his heart and the rise and fall of his chest. He looked peaceful, but Itachi only found that even more disturbing. Death shouldn't look that natural on him.

Madara sighs. He didn't enjoy this plan either, but it was the plan that had the most 'realistic' chance of success. "Shisui, I would refrain from giving him time estimates." The Uchiha patriarch knew his son and knew that would only make him more anxious. Itachi was likely counting down the seconds and even milliseconds at this point, if such a thing was possible. "This will work, Itachi. We've gotten through the hardest part."

"That's right." Shisui glances back at his anxious cousin. "He's safe now and out of the clutches of those assholes. So focus on what you're going to say to him when he wakes up." Because Sasuke was going to need an anchor, and Shisui knew that only one person had the right to be that for their little cousin.

"I know." Itachi sighs, not daring to look away from Sasuke. "Believe me, I know." He brushes a soft lock of hair from his beloved's face, watching the play of light and shadows over Sasuke's skin.

He was beautiful.

The four hour drive back to the family's main estate Felt longer with the anxiety thick in the air, but
as soon as Madara's vehicle was parked in front of the main steps, Shisui was bolting out of his seat and whirling around to open the door for Itachi. "Let's go." The sooner they made Sasuke comfortable, the better.

Itachi gently picks Sasuke up and carries him towards the door. "Open it, please." It was a fairly long walk to the door of the house, but he had closed the distance almost unbelievably quickly even when the ginger way he carried his beloved was taken into account.

"Alright." Shisui pushes open the door, entering first and clearing the path inside as he holds the door open. Sasuke's head lolls against Itachi's shoulder, a tiny sound escaping as a soft gasp is exhaled across Itachi's skin. A fact that Shisui doesn't miss, but can hardly believe. It was too soon. "Itachi..."

"I know." He nods as he carries Sasuke swiftly inside and up the stairs to the second floor. "We've planned for this." Perhaps not as swiftly as it was happening, but still. He at least knew where to take his soulmate for recovery.

Shisui follows Itachi to one of the guest bedrooms, already prepared by the anxious mother bustling about. A bowl of cool water lay on the small table by the bed. Along with clean cloths and a change of clothes. A small pot of medicinal tea sits next to a couple of bottles of distilled water and one bottle of mineral water. The mixture that Sasuke had inhaled would have to be sweated out, so Shisui had anticipated the fever and prepared accordingly. He pulls a number of blankets from the closet and sets them out at the foot of the bed.

Itachi gently lays Sasuke down and uncaps the water quickly. When Sasuke fully woke up, that was going to be the first thing he wanted, once the panic subsided slightly anyway. "We're as prepared as we can be." He sighs as he reaches for the medicine tea and clothes.

While Itachi works his way around the supplies, Shisui changes Sasuke into warm pyjamas and tucks his little cousin into bed, then dips a cloth in the bowl of water to lay on Sasuke's forehead. His cheeks were starting to flush slightly, which meant that his temperature would spike soon. But there was still one thing that Shisui could do for Sasuke that could make this situation better. After all, there was no need for Sasuke to relive the memories of this morning...ever. "Itachi, don't stop me." He sits next to the pillow and places his hands on either side of Sasuke's head. "It's better this way."

Itachi's eyes narrow. "If you remove the memory, how are you going to explain all this?" What exactly was Shisui planning. "That he isn't going to be punished for his crimes and why we've gotten him a new identity and everything else? The case will be all the tv, internet, and everything else. We can't pretend it never happened." Sasuke wasn't blind, deaf, and dumb. He'd realize what had happened sooner or later.

Gentle hands glow with a soft light, turning Sasuke's raven locks a dark blue. "I'm going to replace it with another. He'll know that the execution went through, he'll remember that he 'died'." Shisui did know what he was doing, after all. "But he'll remember being calm as he died. He'll remember peace, and none of the terror." None of the loneliness...and none of the darkness.

It was a tempting thought. Though it didn't entirely sit right with Itachi. Shisui was meddling with things that probably shouldn't be meddled with. How did they really know Shisui wouldn't accidentally harm Sasuke in the process? "Is that even safe?" He raises an eyebrow. "For the both of you?"

Shisui smiles ruefully. "It's perfectly safe for him. And it's not the first time I've done this, so I know how to make it as non-invasive as possible." He began reaching into the freshest memories
Sasuke had, facilitated by Sasuke's unconscious state. He could feel it, touch it, pull on it and twist it so that it no longer caused Sasuke pain.

Itachi's eyes further narrow at the thought. "Dare I even ask how many times you've done this?" The thought that Shisui might have done it to him without his knowledge was a disturbing one. "In any case do it before he wakes up."

Shisui nods slightly, the glow intensifying a little as he seeks out Sasuke's memories and slowly begins to pull out parts and weave together others. "...I work for the CIA, Itachi...and sometimes that means that I see people suffering under weight that no one can bear. Usually, all it takes is a little tweak, just pull something out and push something else back in its place, and someone who was being crushed could finally start to move on. Sometimes just a feeling, or a memory of something seen just out of the corner of the eye. The devil is in the details...so sometimes I have to dance with the devil."

Itachi says nothing. The answer was apparently a lot or at least fairly regularly then. It was disturbing, but Shisui was doing it out of mercy. He couldn't wait to quit his job and humiliate all of them who deserved it. Those prosecutors. The people who had helped Sasuke be put to death and all those people who been exposed in Sasuke's books.

He breathes out a laboured sigh, trying to hold in his nausea, then lets his hands fall away. "...It's done. Sasuke should be safe now." He stands unsteadily, the waves of emotion still coursing through him as he tried to purge them from his own mind. "I'm going to go call in sick for a few days, then go to bed." But first, he was going to get well-acquainted with the porcelain throne.

"Probably a good idea." Itachi casts a sympathetic look at his cousin before looking at Sasuke. "I already informally turned in my resignation anyway."

"Right." Shisui nods, but it only made the urge to vomit a little worse. "I'll...see you two later." He stumbles slightly on his way to the door, glancing back just once to check on Sasuke one more time, before disappearing through the doorway and sealing the room behind him.

Itachi couldn't help but feel a bit guilty. This hadn't been easy for Shisui either, but at least his mental block had held. Otherwise, he was quite certain his beloved cousin would have ended up in the hospital. True the other man had developed a habit of saying the wrong thing lately, but that was partially Itachi's fault. He'd never closed off to him to this extent before. "It's going to be alright, Sasuke." Itachi smiles at him. "You're safe now."

Sasuke shifts slightly under the covers, his cheeks flushed a rosy pink as little drops of sweat run down from his temples, mixed with cool drops of water from the damp cloth. "...Tachi..." He breathes deeply, his pulse fluttering in his throat.

"It's alright, Sasuke." He smiles at him. "You're safe now. It's all over." He was repeating himself, but Itachi didn't really know how much of his words Sasuke could hear.

Pale fingers twitch atop the blanket as Sasuke's breathing quickens for a moment, before slowing down once more. "Nghh."

"Take it easy." Itachi sighs as he gets him some water. "I'm going to give you a drink. It should help." He didn't want to risk choking the other man by not warning him.

Onyx eyes flutter open for a moment, passing over Itachi's face before closing again, pale lips parting slightly in a soft pant. Sasuke's head tilts towards Itachi, still seeking out comfort in a
minimally conscious, fever-hazed delirium.

He holds the water bottle to his lips and gently pours a small portion into his mouth. Sasuke's fever would be no laughing matter, especially when he sweated out the potion. Hydration was critical.

With a little difficulty, Sasuke obediently drinks, only coughing twice as the cool water runs down his throat. A small trickle runs out the side of his mouth, dripping down flushed, heated skin as it trails down his neck.

"There." He smiles. "Take it easy. You don't need to talk until you're ready."

Not that he could have spoken if he wanted to. Sasuke's eyes flicker open once more, a haze clouding his gaze, then they close once more as he drifts back into unconsciousness. He was fighting so hard, but biology had won out. Itachi shakes his head and decides to let Sasuke rest. He certainly deserved it.

The next eighteen hours were spent with Sasuke drifting in and out of consciousness, never coherently, but enough that he could be kept hydrated and given medicine. Shisui hadn't been seen since retreating to bed. And the atmosphere of the house had grown...not dark, but certainly tense.

Fugaku strode into the bedroom where Itachi continued to sit by Sasuke's bedside, too stubborn to take a room for himself and get some sleep. So he places another cup of coffee down beside Itachi and takes the empty one. "He will wake soon, Itachi. Sasuke is strong." As was made apparent when he began early recovering far ahead of schedule, a feat befitting a proud Uchiha.

"He has woken up." Itachi looks at the father, who must be feeling the very same things Itachi was. "Several times, but never for long or with much coherency. I know that's normal for a situation like this as much as normal can exist right now, but I'd be lying, if I said I wasn't worried. Mikoto must be beside herself as well." Actually, the other Uchiha male in the room was taking this almost disturbingly well. "How are you remaining so...calm?"

"I am calm because I have faith that he will be fine." Fugaku lets his gaze drift from Itachi to Sasuke, a faint smile playing at his lips. "I may not have had the chance to see him grow up, but he is my son, and I know that he will not allow himself to be beaten this time." It would be hard, but Sasuke's spirit would return.

His faith was admirable, but Itachi wouldn't allow himself to believe it until he saw it. So he gives the other man a nod of approval.

Fugaku takes that as his cue to leave. Which was just as well. Someone had to check on Shisui, and Mikoto was cooking up a storm in the kitchen in her desire to deal with her anxiety. If it weren't for his and Madara's ability to keep their heads, there would likely be no sanity left in this house. And Madara's was certainly debate able at times.

As the door closes, Sasuke begins to stir again, squirming slightly under the blankets. The warmed cloth slides off of his forehead and his eyelashes flutter as his eyes squeeze tightly shut against the droplets threatening to spill into them.

Itachi adjusts the wash cloth as he prepares to get him a new one. "I hope he's right." Fugaku's faith was surprisingly unshakable for a man who had been in his position.

But when the elder turns around to place the cloth back on Sasuke's forehead, alert onyx eyes greet
him, watching warily, and with a slight edge of confusion as he blinks the sleep from his eyes. "...Itachi?"

"It's me." Itachi smiles at him. "Try not to overexert yourself. You've been through a lot."

Through a lot was...putting it kind of mildly, wasn't it? "I'm...supposed to be dead, aren't I?" Unless Itachi was dead too in which case Sasuke was going to kick his ass for this. "What...happened?"

"It's a very long story." Itachi rubs the back of his head sheepishly. "Though to put your mind at ease, we faked your death and got you out of there before your body stayed dead. As far as they're all concerned Sasuke Uchiha is dead." He smiles at him. "We've already crafted a new identity for you."

"You...what?" Sasuke blinks sure that he misheard something somewhere. "Did you...faked my death?"

"Yes, that's what I said." He kisses his forehead. "We can explain the details later. I don't want to overwhelm you."

Sasuke didn't know how to make heads or tails of this situation. It was all just so...unbelievable, like something that would happen in a movie. But if Itachi was so willing to shower him with easy attention, he could indulge for a little while. He sighs and leans against Itachi's shoulder. "Considering that I just came back from the dead I think I'm a bit past overwhelmed."

Itachi runs his fingers through his hair. It was a lot to take in and he wouldn't force Sasuke to adjust that quickly. Besides, Sasuke had always liked having his hair played with. "I know." He smiles at him. "I just don't want to overwhelm you anymore than you already are."

"Hn." Sasuke closes his eyes, a hint of a smile playing about his lips. "I think you just want to get out of explaining things." But if Itachi insisted, then he could wait. Not for too long, though, he wasn't very patient. Still, he sighs and leans into the touch, enjoying the gentle fingers in his hair as the sigh becomes a soft purr.

"I'm not quite as exhausted as you, but I won't entirely deny that charge." He chuckles as he continues his administrations.

"Mm..." Sasuke nods slightly, pressing his hands to the bed and sitting himself up slowly to lean against Itachi's chest. "...I should probably yell at you for breaking the law and basically kidnapping me, but...I can't really find any fucks to give right now." Not when Itachi was treating him so sweetly.

"Oh don't worry." He laughs at that as he holds Sasuke. "I'm sure you'll have many fucks to give once you're recovered."

Sasuke chuckles quietly. "Yeah, I can always yell at you for this later." If he cared enough to. Then he grows quiet, his brain still very much working on the problem. "Itachi...how long have you been planning to save me?" This couldn't have been a spur of the moment thing, not if the relative lack of Feds breaking down the door was any indication.

He looks away in an effort to hide at least some of his guilt. "Awhile, but we couldn't tell you because of all the cameras." Itachi doubted it worked, but it was something. Right?

"...That's why you wanted me to forgive you...for what you were going to do." Now a few things Itachi had said to him over the last few months were clicking into place. Though overwhelmed mostly by relief, Sasuke felt the slightest pang of resentment, mostly over what Itachi had said
when he'd come to tell him of the verdict. It had hurt so much... "Because...you were going to let me believe I was going to die."

"Yes, that's why." Itachi sighs as he looks at him. "I didn't want to tell you that we were going to save you, if there was a chance it wouldn't work either..."

"...I see." Sasuke exhales a deep breath. "...I understand why you did it. And in your position, I might have done the same thing. So I forgive you." If only things we're really that simple... "It's just going to take some time to stop hurting."

"Good. I largely feel the same way." Itachi shakes his head. "I'll never understand turning yourself in though, but it's over now. We can eventually move past it."

Maybe Itachi would never understand it, but it didn't really matter now, since Sasuke could hardly do it again. And after the last few months, he really didn't feel like reliving any of that. "Yeah, okay." But that still left things up in the air. "So what now? You've kissed me awake, and now we ride off to a castle on a white horse?"

"I'm afraid I don't actually have a castle or a horse, but something like that." Itachi chuckles softly. Sasuke smiles and tilts his head up to press a kiss to Itachi's cheek. Then he notes that he felt on the hot and sweaty side. "What happened to me, anyway? I remember...weird flashes of people... You, Mom, Dad, Shisui..."

"We were all at your 'execution' so that's not unexpected." He sighs as he holds him closely. "We used a spell and tinkered with the chemical they used to do it."

Right, Sasuke remembered that part fairly clearly, how he'd just laid down and let them do it. But after that was where it got fuzzy. "So then...I'm all hot and sweaty because...?"

"Your body is burning off the negative effects in the form of a fever." He shakes his head. "We had to fake your death and couldn't negate all the unpleasant effects. You'll be fine though in the long-term, but for all practical purposes you have a bad case of the flu now."

Ah, that explained a lot. "So flu-like symptoms, but I'm not contagious." Sasuke wasn't sure whether to be happy or annoyed by that. On the one hand, it was good not to be contagious, and likely already on the mend. But on the other hand, if he was going to be suffering the effects of the flu, then his pride would rather that he just be battling the flu and not some weird substance they gassed him with. "So does this mean I could take shower soon?" Preferably a five hour one so that he could scrub off all the traces of that prison left on him.

"Yes, you can shower if you like." Itachi smiles slyly at him. "I'll help you."

Flushed cheeks darken suddenly and Sasuke presses his face back down into Itachi's neck as he tries to conceal his heated expression. "I think...maybe I should go alone." He didn't think that having Itachi try to frisk him in the shower was a good idea. Not until he was comfortable with...everything.

"Sasuke, I'm not an animal." Itachi shakes his head in amusement. "I know that you're not in any condition for the fun kind of shower, but you're likely unsteady on your feet. So allow me to escort you to the bathroom."

Sasuke swallows nervously, but the nervousness ebbs away, softening in Itachi's gentle gaze. "...Okay, I guess you're right." Itachi was fine, Itachi was safe. Safe wasn't a word that Sasuke was used to indulging in, but for Itachi, he would.
Itachi nods, pleased that Sasuke had surrendered relatively easily, and helps his beloved to the bathroom. Besides, he could always frisk Sasuke in the shower when he was better.

As Sasuke half walks, half stumbles to the bathroom with Itachi's help, he notes the soft pyjamas that he'd been changed into, the button-up top already soaked through with sweat. And maybe it was an exercise in masochism, but Sasuke couldn't help himself as he starts to work apart the slightly slippery buttons. "Do you often offer to lend a hand when someone needs a shower?"

"Occasionally." Itachi smirks at him as he places a feather light kiss to the back of Sasuke's neck. "Though you'll be the only one that I'll make such an offer to from now on."

Sasuke shivers as Itachi's lips brush the sensitive place at the nape of his neck. "I see." His fingers pop several of the buttons, letting the soft material slip down his shoulders inch by inch. It wasn't that he doubted Itachi's loyalty, but keeping Itachi's attention would be...probably not as hard as Sasuke's anxiety made it out to be, but still...

"I'll be outside if you need me." He smiles. "I know you probably want some privacy right now."

A weight lifts from Sasuke's shoulders and he smiles. "Sure. Thanks." He could manage this much on his own. "And if I end up slipping, I'll just phase through the floor." He could keep himself from getting hurt easily enough.

"Didn't realize you could do that." He tilts his head. "Though I guess that makes sense."

Sasuke smirks as he reaches out to dim the lights to his preference, casting soft shadows all around the bathroom. "If there's a shadow, I can disappear. The trick is making sure that no one sees me." The shirt swings from his arms, so he slips his hands out and folds the damp fabric over.

"Realistically, I would be more likely to fall into the floor and out of a curtain."

Well, that was good to know. Though Itachi knew what the limits of his self-control were and he was probably going to reach them if Sasuke stripped completely."I'll leave you to it." He smiles as he saunters out of the bathroom.

A soft smile crosses Sasuke's face, and he puts the clothes in a pile on the counter before stepping unsteadily into the shower and bracing himself against the wall as he fiddles with the control panel. The first faceful of bubbles was a surprise, but he would get the hang of things soon enough.

After finding a fresh pair of pyjamas to change into waiting just outside of the door, Sasuke carefully limps back to the bed in the guest room to find the sheets freshly changed and Itachi nowhere in sight. He frowns, but approaches the bed anyway and sits down on the new, dark blue covers. The royal blue was nice, it made him feel calm.

He didn't really like sitting around in bed much, but he knew he'd have to stomach it for a little while longer. So, Sasuke folds back the covers and slides himself back into bed, propping up the pillows behind him to make sitting more comfortable. Just because he was IN bed, it didn't necessarily mean that he had to do nothing but sleep.

Itachi had waited awhile and gotten another tray of food before coming back. "Hey," Sasuke already seemed to be doing so much better than before. The transformation was quite stunning really. "You hungry?"

Now that Itachi mentioned it, Sasuke's gas tank did feel a little on the empty side. "I could eat. I
don't know what the side-effects of whatever you roofied me with are, but I don't feel like throwing up, at least."

Itachi tries not to bristle at that description. It was so... evil. What he had done wasn't evil. He had saved Sasuke's life. "That carries such a negative connotation." He sits on the bed with Sasuke. "I don't like that we had to deceive you, but it did save your life."

Maybe, but that didn't mean that Sasuke wouldn't make Itachi squirm a little. Or twitch. Whatever worked. "Are you here to give me food or a play by play of the last twenty-four hours?"

"I suppose you're feeling better if your sarcasm has been fully restored." Itachi offers him the food.

"Yeah, my sarcasm is usually the first thing to recover." Sasuke glances at the tray of food, raising an eyebrow at the large bowl of creamy tomato soup. He licks his lips, pupils dilating slightly as the scent reaches his nose.

He shakes his head in amusement as he spoonfeeds Sasuke. "I see. Well hopefully, your appetite is the second thing." Itachi knew how much he loved tomato soup. So that's why he had gotten it.

Really? Itachi was going to feed him? A hint of pink blooms across Sasuke's cheeks as he closes his lips around the offered spoon, using his tongue to suck down the soup gently, easing it down his throat. "...I don't think my appetite is going to be a problem."

"Good." Itachi smiles at him. "I'm glad."

Alright, maybe Sasuke was willing to be a good boy if Itachi was going to bring him tomato soup. "So, how long do you think it'll be before I can walk around without problems again?"

"I'm not sure. I'd have to ask Shisui." Itachi sighs as he helps Sasuke eat some more. "He knows more about that sort of thing than I do."

"Oh." Sasuke swallows a few more spoonfuls of soup, letting a warmth coil in his stomach. "Where's Shisui?"

"He's probably downstairs." Itachi pulls his cell phone out of his pocket. "I'll call him." Then proceeds to do exactly that. "Shisui, how long do you think it will be until Sasuke can walk around freely?"

A soft groan drifts from the phone. "...Probably by tomorrow, but two or three more days before all of the symptoms are gone and the last traces..." The connection muffles a bit, before clearing back up with the sound of a flushing toilet. "The last traces should be out of his system by then."

Right. Shisui wasn't having a good day either, but at least it was all over. Things would get better now. "Good." He pauses. "Hopefully, you'll be better before then. Did you take anything?"

There's a pause as Shisui takes a few deep breaths. "Three different types of nausea medication. Still waiting for them to kick in..."

"Alright." He sighs. "You'll feel better soon. You've already taken medication and he's safe." Itachi smiles as he searches for the right words to say. "I don't know how that's possible, but you pulled off a miracle."

"Yeah, great...I'm just...going to go back to bed. Later 'Tachi." The call cuts out, but not before one last unpleasant sound of vomiting can be heard over the line.
Sasuke cringes at the sound of his cousin's sickness. "What...happened to Shisui?"

"It's just the stress and adrenaline crash got to him." Itachi kisses Sasuke's forehead in an effort to reassure him. "None of us have had an easy time of it recently, but he's an Uchiha. He'll be fine. Eventually."

"Okay." It didn't make Sasuke feel much better, though. Because one way or another, all the stress everyone had been under was because of him. And that made Shisui's sickness his fault. Which meant he was screwing up again.
Chapter 22

Chapter by celestia193

Chapter Notes

celestia193’s Author's Note: ...Sasuke is sassy. And a tease. Itachi is not impressed.

It was by far the roughest three days that Shisui had ever seen. Not only did he have what amounted to the hangover from Hell, but he'd had to interrupt his fifth date with the toilet to go tell his stupid cousin to just go to bed already, or he was going to be the one who collapsed instead of Sasuke.

It was so nice when the storm had mostly passed by 1 am, Saturday morning, leaving the entire family to breathe a sigh of relief. Which meant that Shisui could finally breathe again once the anxiety levels dropped below what he could feel with his ambient empathy.

But it was eight in the morning when he finally traipsed downstairs to the living room to find Itachi sitting on the couch with Sasuke's head in his lap, stroking the dark, spiky hair. It was an image that Shisui would burn into his memory forever, it was so sweet. "...He fell asleep while you two were talking again?" He keeps his voice low so as not to wake the young man in Itachi's lap, wearing the same jeans and sleeveless black shirt as the day they arrested him.

Itachi simply nods at Shisui. He didn't want to risk waking Sasuke up. He needed his sleep after everything that had happened and nodding was enough to convey his message, Itachi muses as he runs his fingers through those wonderful dark locks once more.

Shisui smiles and backs away from the couch. As important as it was for Sasuke to catch up on a lot of missed sleep, another important aspect to his recovery would be plenty of food. And after the week they'd all had, a large family breakfast was definitely in order.

Sasuke slowly stirs awake around nine, sniffing the air even as he blinks his eyes sleepily. He felt warm and safe and... "Itachi?" He blinks once more as a face comes into focus above him through the thin, silky strands of his bangs.

"Mhm." He smiles and kisses Sasuke's forehead. "When you feel up to it, we can have breakfast." It was time for breakfast already? "...I fell asleep on you, didn't I?" Sasuke would swear that he hadn't meant to, but Itachi just had this way of petting him that could make him just want to curl up and go to sleep. He also had a way of petting him that made him want to kiss Itachi and never let go.

"Yes, you did." He shakes his head in amusement. "Though you don't need to feel guilty about that. Your body simply needs sleep to recover."

Sure, Sasuke knew that logically, but he still felt bad for falling asleep on Itachi while he was in the middle of telling Sasuke a story. Even if Itachi's gentle voice and hands made it really hard not to
fall asleep. "Who's cooking?"

"I'm not sure." He chuckles. "Probably Shisui since he attempted to rouse us." His cousin was an excellent cook. Itachi had to give him that much.

Sasuke inhales deeply, sighing softly into the air. "I smell pancakes, bacon and eggs, sausages, and toast with raspberry jam." And enough to feed a small army, judging by the potency of the smells. So he sits up, kissing Itachi on the way. "Let's go."

Itachi returns the kiss happily. It was hard not to be happy when Sasuke kissed him. It meant that Sasuke was alive and well and his soulmate was an exceptional kisser. He hadn't been lying to his father about that much. That and the thought of a good breakfast was enough to put a pep into his step. "Yes." He smiles as he leads Sasuke to the kitchen. "Let's."

Sasuke smiles a little shyly as Itachi's fingers clasp around his hand on their way too the kitchen and dining room. Most of his experience with Itachi's affection was in a one on one setting, so to be subject to it in front of the four other people in the room was a bit nerve-wracking. Though the embarrassment mostly evaporated when he saw just what a feast of breakfast food that his mom and Shisui were carrying out to the table.

"As you can see, Shisui is a fantastic cook and your mother is even better." He chuckles at the look on Sasuke's face. "Try not to eat too much or you'll get sick, but you can have whatever you like."

"Looks good." Sasuke hesitantly takes a seat at a plate over from his father, assuming that the empty space is for his mother. Family meals weren't really a thing when you lived off and on with vampires.

"Here." Shisui grins widely as he tosses Sasuke a couple of pancakes and sets down a large plate of juicy sausages. "Maple syrup is in the crystal decanter."

Sasuke dead pans. "You put maple syrup in something made of crystal?"

Shisui shrugs. "It was Uncle Madara's idea."

That did sound like something his father would suggest. "Right." Itachi laughed. "Let's dig in then."

"Yeah..." Sasuke's gaze drifts around the table, not sure where to start or if there was a protocol he had to follow, or...

Then Shisui turns the plate of sausages around and pushes them towards Sasuke. "The ones on the left are mild, the medium ones are in the middle, the ones on the left are hot and spicy." The he tosses the tongs to Sasuke. "Have at it!"

"Hn." With a snort and a smile, Sasuke goes for the spicy ones on the left, picking up three of them and a small stack of bacon while his mother sits down and starts dishing up food for herself and his father.

Itachi reaches for some mild sausages and smiles as he watches Sasuke. It was amazing how something as simple as breakfast could make him so happy.

But as soon as Sasuke put the first sausage in his mouth, Itachi didn't know the torture he was in for.
Sasuke lay VERY smugly on the couch with Shisui as they waited for Itachi to rejoin them. It was nice that Itachi was respecting his boundaries and comfort zones, but the look on his face after he'd gone through those sausages was priceless. And...he knew that he was going to end up paying for it later. Especially considering that Itachi had stepped out a good fifteen minutes before breakfast was over. They both knew that the bathroom excuse was a flimsy one, and Sasuke knew exactly what Itachi had been doing in there. And simply showering was NOT the answer.

Itachi comes out of the shower, still drying his hair with a towel. He gives Sasuke a dirty look. He was fortunate that he was still recovering. Uchihas and cold showers were not a pleasant combination.

The smug smirk only grows as Sasuke enjoys a purely friendly, though mostly therapeutic, scalp massage from Shisui. Especially since it gave him a perfect view of Itachi as his soulmate came striding back into the living room. "Enjoy your shower, 'Tachi?"

"You're never eating sausages again." Itachi grits his teeth. "Ever, unless you shower with me immediately afterwards." The smug bastard.

Shisui chuckles as he continues his ministrations... "I think you got Itachi a little worked up there, Sasuke." And his little cousin was really asking for it, being so smug.

Sasuke shrugs, the smirk not fading in the least. "I was eating and those sausages were really good."

Yes, they were, but even Shisui was impressed by just how suggestive Sasuke could make eating be. On the totally platonic side, though, Shisui did appreciate that Sasuke enjoyed the sausages. Even if the appreciative moans did send Itachi running for the shower. Which, admittedly, was probably the funniest thing that Shisui had ever seen at the breakfast table. And he knew that he was far from the only one amused.

"You were enjoying them a little too much for it to be normal." He huffed. "Granted they were excellent sausages, but still."

"Yes...they were." Sasuke smiles as he looks Itachi up and down. It seemed that pale skin ran in the family, but a few members like Madara, his father, and Itachi could manage to tan a little. Sasuke certainly couldn't, he only burned. Besides, he preferred the shade anyway. But Itachi looked like he'd been kissed by the sun, and Sasuke thought it was wonderful.

On the other hand, now that breakfast was over and he had Shisui and Itachi in the same room, it was time for Sasuke to finally get some answers out of them. "So, what's the plan now?"

"Shisui should probably explain that." Itachi sighs as he looks at Sasuke with a guilty expression. "I'm afraid that I wasn't much use in the technical details." He had been too distressed.

"Right." Sasuke takes a deep breath and ruffles Sasuke's hair. "Now that the government believes that you died of nitrogen asphyxiation, you'll have to forego any public use of your real name from now on. Because of this, and because your original identification documents are forged anyway, we've set up a false identity for you to use from now on. Because you're Canadian by birth and residency, and are fluent in both English and French, along with being very familiar with the country's history, no one should suspect you of not being who you claim to be."

Alright, that sounded easy enough Sasuke could handle a new identity. "Does this mean that I'll be going back to Canada, then?" That was definitely a safer place than being kept this close to the eyes and ears of the CIA. the last thing they needed to know was that they didn't do the job right.
"In the immediate future, yes." Itachi sighs and nods. "Though I'm still not convinced that eventually the Amazon or private island wouldn't be better." He wasn't in the mood to take any chances with his soulmate's safety, even if said soulmate was a cocktease.

Sasuke deadpans. "You want to take me to the brightest part of the planet?" Did the fact that he liked it on the dark side not sink in yet?

"You know what I meant." Itachi glares at him. "Some place far away from 'civilization.'"

"Does that mean the Arctic is up for debate?" Sasuke snickers at the thought of a born and grown American trying to handle the frigid arctic temperatures. "Because I'm pretty sure that short of polar bears, no one would look for us up there."

"Shisui is a bad influence on you." Itachi rolled his eyes. "Granted, you've always been sarcastic, but other than your martyr tendencies, you've never been this difficult. When you're better, I'm dragging you to the shower for a well deserved spanking."

"Promises, promises." And Sasuke wouldn't admit it out loud, but the idea was a titillating one. Shisui coughs loudly into his fist. "Uh...maybe the two of you should save the games for when you're back across the border with your escort?"

Sasuke frowns. "Wait, escort?" And for...them? did Sasuke hear it right? He turns his head towards Itachi. "You're...actually coming with me?"

"Yes, I am." He looks at him in confusion. "I'm not sure why you're surprised by that." It was almost hurtful that he was.

It was almost inconceivable, but Sasuke could almost swear that he saw a hint of insecurity in Itachi's eyes. "I just...thought that you would have more to do here before...coming with me." Plus, it was a lot to ask of Itachi to just come along to Canada at the drop of a hat. "I mean, you'd need a visa and to apply for--"

"For permanent resident status, and then wait the needed time for obtaining citizenship." Shisui nods, smiling. "Don't worry about that, we've been laying everything out for Itachi so that he can go with you. And seeing as he'll be handing in his official resignation on Monday, the two of you will be able to catch a flight to Toronto that afternoon. With the help of a friend of yours, who should be arriving very soon, to help sneak you through public places, of course."

"...A friend?" Sasuke glances at Itachi. "...What did you do?"

"Gaara." He smirks at him. If Sasuke thought he could get away with being sassy, he was sorely mistaken. "After all, he is your best friend and probably the main reason why you lived long enough for me to find you in the first place."

"Speaking of..." Shisui smirks as Sasuke's face pales. "The door's open!" He'd sensed the vampire's approach about half a minute ago. The Irish vampire was certainly light on his feet, and clearly none too pleased about the circumstances under which he would be retrieving his surrogate 'son'.

Monday afternoon, after Sasuke had had some bonding time with his parents, he was finally ushered out to the car that Gaara had acquired after arriving, which would take them to the airport, where Gaara and Itachi would board a plane, and Sasuke would sneak on by phasing right through the bottom of the hull. But first, they'd have to walk through an airport, which meant that Sasuke
had needed about twenty minutes in the bathroom before leaving to fill his hair with blue streaks and line his eyes with kohl.

And he was feeling…more than a little nervous about all of this. "You're a crazy asshole, Gaara. You want me to use my powers here?" They were surrounded by people!

Itachi wasn't crazy about the plan either, but he nods. "It's the only way we can get you there short of driving or getting a private jet." How else were they supposed to travel this distance.

Right, because Sasuke's shadow abilities only worked over short distances. It would be so much more convenient if he was actually a long-distance teleporter. "Yeah, but I need to find a dark corner first…where no one can see me…"

Gaara looks at Sasuke as though he was being difficult. Really? Now, he had decided to be cautious after everything? "You've picked a hell of a time to turn into a skittish yearling." He rolls his eyes.

"We'll find you the spot." He'd make sure of it.

Sasuke deadpans. "Well, it didn't really matter before whether or not I got caught." Now, things were different. Now his life actually mattered. And right now, he needed to find a corner that he could hide in and…ahah! "Itachi, come with me." He grabs onto his soulmate's arm and pulls him away from the security desk. He had a plan, and he could see exactly where the cameras were and how to stay just in their blind spot.

Itachi allows Sasuke to drag him off. He had done this countless times before. So he was confident the other man could do it again. In other words, he would just go with it.

Sure, this might make Itachi seem a bit sleazy, or like a player, but Sasuke didn't really mind adding to whatever reputation Itachi would inevitably get wherever he went with looks like those.

So, he presses himself into a corner, pulling Itachi to tower over him and cast him in shadow. "Come here." He smirks slightly and reaches up, pulling Itachi in by his collar and planting a fiery kiss on his lips.

Whatever he had been expecting, that certainly wasn't it. "Alright." Itachi returns the kiss eagerly though. This was a far more pleasant plan the ones he had come to expect.

After a short battle waged between their tongues, Sasuke nips Itachi lightly, his eyes glowing ruby red as he ensures that no one is watching. "See you in Toronto." And in Itachi's shadow, Sasuke dissolves slowly into darkness, disappearing into the wall like a dark mist.

Itachi was really beginning to understand why they had soulmate and enemy tattoos. At this rate, he was going to run out of cold water in whatever shower he used. That evil bastard.

The Irish vampire smirks at the sight of one frustrated human. It seemed that, if nothing else, Sasuke loved playing the cocktease. "Come on, you can punish him later, once my sister is done with him." He'd already gotten Itachi's luggage checked in, all that was left now was to go through security and board the plane. If you have any particular requests, I can pass them along to her."

"You're right." The Uchiha in question sighs as he heads off with the vampire. "I never thought that I'd see the day when vampires were the angels of mercy."

"Believe me, neither did I." Gaara chuckles sadistically. "But I assure you that Sasuke will be duly punished when we arrive home. Temari may even let you choose the style of the piercings."
Piercings had never really been his thing for the most part. Though Itachi knew the vampire was trying to offer him a boon. "That's kind of you to offer." He smiles. "Well, let's get home then." Apparently, his new home would be Canada.

A short while later, they were all safely boarded. Gaara breathes out a sigh of relief as he settles into his first class seat and idly munches on some complementary peanuts. Yes, vampires could eat human food. It just wasn't a requirement. There were benefits to this, of course. It made blending in easier and there was just the enjoyment factor. Plus it did sometimes dull one's thirst.

"Why now?" He sighs as his phone goes off and he answers it. "Please don't let this be from Madara." Telling him that something was wrong.

I hope your visit to your little brother is going well. I'd very much like to meet his lover when you get back. Do you think they'll like whips and chains? Or should I give them some fuzzy handcuffs as a housewarming present instead? ~ Hinata

It took a lot to surprise Gaara, but that certainly did it. The innocent looking fairy had nearly given him a heart attack with just one paragraph.

That's kind of you, but I think they're more interested in the more...gentle side of lovemaking. - Gaara

The phone buzzes again, this time, with the image of soft red silk ribbons.

Think they'd like these instead? They're much more gentle. ~ Hinata

I'll have to ask them later. That's very thoughtful of you. ~ Gaara

Well in a deviant sort of way. What the hell was his adorable fairy doing with whips and chains in the first place though? A pole dance was one thing, but he hadn't expected her tastes to be that exotic...

The phone vibrates again, this time a picture of a moderately sized blue dildo pops up. If Alex likes, he can practice with this. I've never used it, but it vibrates! ~ Hinata

I'm sure he appreciates how...thorough you're being in your gift selection, but I don't think he'll want to practice. ~ Gaara

Then maybe some dance lessons? I'm sure his lover would enjoy that. They're excellent for endurance and flexibility. ;) ~ Hinata

She wanted to help so badly in her own deviant way. It was sweet, if slightly disturbing.

Yes, I'm sure they are. Perhaps that would be best. ~ Gaara

Then I'll stop by before his shifts and give him some lessons in the back room. You don't mind, do you, Sweetie? ~ Hinata

Sweetie? He was going to get whiplash at this rate. They were probably going to have to discuss what constituted acceptable behavior in the bedroom. He was a vampire and she was his natural prey, whips and chains would be a bad idea to employ unless she used them on him.

I don't have issues of jealousy when it comes to a gay man who has already found his soulmate. ~
Gaara

Aw...and here I was looking forward to chaining you up and teaching you to be a good boy. Oh well, I'm sure I'll find another excuse. ~ Hinata

Gaara swallows hard at that. This fairy was going to be the death of him AGAIN. Technically, he was already dead seeing as how he was a vampire, but there was a difference between dead and dead, dead.

I'm not...entirely sure how to respond to that. ~ Gaara

Well, by popping a boner on the plane, hopefully. But if you don't, I can wait to do that in person. ~ Hinata

There was something...rather bizarre about a fairy saying that word. Never in his life had Gaara felt so tongue tied.

I may get a broken jaw from my jaw dropping so much, but I assure you that THAT particular part of my anatomy is highly unlikely to have any issues responding to you. ~ Gaara.

Oh, good. Then I'll just have to do it again when you get home. I'm waiting for you! ~ Hinata

And just for good measure, the phone vibrates one more time, and a picture of a lingerie-clad Hinata appears on the screen, wearing only a very skimpy set of lacy white lingerie.

Gaara feels something wet slid down his face. It takes him a moment to realize what had happened. That damn fairy had just given him a nosebleed.

The signal lights in the plane flash, warning all passengers to turn off transmitting functions on their electronic devices as flight attendants walk down the aisles.

He quickly shuts off his phone. Rules were rules, he supposed. He could always look at that picture later...

After a couple of hours stuck in the uncomfortable cargo hold, Sasuke disappears and rematerializes in his usual spot in Toronto's international airport. This place, he knew like the back of his hand, and he knew all of the best spots to appear and disappear from by heart. In this case, it was in the washroom at the second baggage terminal in this section. No one ever cared about this bathroom unless they'd managed to get sick on the airplane and hold it in until landing.

Sensing the incoming crowd that he could lose himself in, Sasuke steps out of the washroom and into the oncoming throng of people flooding into the room to grab their baggage from the carousel. He circles around once, before heading for the carousel, where he spotted a head of vibrant red hair. "There you two are." He smiles softly, crossing his arms as he leans against one of the decorative pillars. "Good flight?"

"You know one of these days, I'm going to get you back for being such a tease." Itachi shakes his head in amusement as he pulls Sasuke into his arms. "You do know this, don't you?"

Sasuke laughs and wraps his arms around Itachi's neck. "I know." And he looked forward to it, once they got him past whatever might be left of his mental block. "Do you promise to be gentle with me?" He grins teasingly, reaching back to tug on Itachi's ponytail.
The first time yes, but after that not so much. "I'll ease you into it initially." There had been far too many cold showers and almost heart attacks for Itachi's liking.

Dark pupils in equally dark irises dilate slightly. "I think I can get behind that promise." He tangles his fingers in Itachi's long locks and presses a gentle kiss to his lips. "Soon, I promise." He didn't want to wait very much longer either.

Itachi returns the kiss as Gaara chuckles. "Well, I'll tell Temari that she likely won't expect you for a couple days." Given what they had been through, he would be shocked if they came out of each other's arms anytime soon.

Sasuke breaks the kiss for just a moment to look over Itachi's shoulder. "Thank you." Not that he didn't want to see Temari, despite his fear of sitting in her chair again, but right now, he just wanted to be alone with his soulmate.

Gaara nods as he swiftly makes a tactful exit. He knew when he was being dismissed.

Despite his friend's exit, Sasuke's pocket rings with a text, and he pops it out to see an address listed in a text from Gaara. He raises an eyebrow, then another text pops up.

There's a king-sized bed. The keys are in Itachi's pocket. ~ Gaara

The eyebrow rises a little higher. "...Did he just tell us to get a room?"

"I believe so." Itachi chuckles as he grabs the keys. "Don't worry, I made sure it was one that you would approve of. Gaara was most helpful."

Sasuke's gaze drops to Itachi's hand, and he knew the look of those keys. "...Those are the keys to an apartment, aren't they?" Because they sure as hell didn't look like hotel keys. "Wait, so the two of you..." When had THIS happened?

"I spoke with him while you were asleep on the plane." Itachi smiles at him. "Gaara can be quite the efficient vampire."

And of course Itachi knew he'd fallen asleep. He'd probably been monitoring Sasuke's thoughts since he set foot on the jet. "You...want us to move in together." That was kind of fast, but it's not like Sasuke had a problem with it. It was just...sooner than he'd expected.

"I suppose that I shouldn't have assumed..." Though honestly, did he expect Itachi to move to Canada and not live with him.

"No!" Sasuke's hold on Itachi's jacket tightens, and his eyes widen in panic. "No...I mean...I just hadn't really thought about it. I...had other stuff on my mind. I guess it just feels fast because everything else is going fast too." He calms down a little once he has the words out. "I'd love to live together."

Itachi smiles and nods. "Good. I'm glad that you feel that way." It was a start. Now about that room. "Do you want to see it now?"

"Yeah." No point in putting it off. "Let's get a cab and go." He reaches down to pick up a couple of Itachi's bags. "Knowing Temari and Gaara, my stuff is probably there already." What little of it he had. "And uh..." His cheeks flush slightly. "It's probably better if you handle the decorating." Sasuke didn't exactly have pictures or anything to put up, and that seemed more like Itachi's thing, anyway.
Itachi nods at that. He certainly didn't mind doing the decorating or anything else for his soulmate. Finally, they could be left alone and live in peace. "I'll handle that." Itachi begins hailing a cab. "You don't have to worry about stuff like that."

Sasuke chuckles. "Yeah, I just have to worry about all of the hours that Gaara is going to pile on me." Because he already knew that the vampire was going to put him behind the bar there. And this time, probably permanently. "I swear, he's trying to turn me into a vampire without actually turning me. Not that he hasn't threatened to a few times."

"I think that's more of a gift than a threat." Itachi couldn't help but chuckle at the thought of a vampire Sasuke.

"Why, you like being bitten?" Sasuke raises an eyebrow, tilting his head consideringly. "...You DO, don't you? That's why you were at the bar that first night."

Itachi suddenly feels as though his cheeks were on fire. "Well, maybe a slight one." It wasn't like he was into getting his throat torn out.

"Hm... I see, I'll remember that." Sasuke hums smugly, reveling in the red of Itachi's cheeks. "You like being bitten gently."

He was probably never going to stop blushing at this rate. How the hell had Sasuke gotten the upper hand in this situation? "Yes." It was embarrassing. "Gently." Itachi tries to will the blush away, but it was no use. That sucker was here to stay it seemed.

"Hm..." Sasuke grows a mischievous grin on his face, taking hold of Itachi's hand and bringing the pale fingers to his mouth. He pokes his tongue out and sucks the tip of Itachi's index finger into his mouth, swirling his tongue around it and nibbling gently. "Like this?" Itachi was backed against the door of the cab, with no way to escape until they stopped moving. The timing was perfect.

"You're an evil tease." A really sadistic one. "Not exactly, though that is nice." His eyes grow more lidded at the attention. "I do hope that you intend to do something beyond tease me if you keep this up."

"...Yes." Sasuke takes a deep breath, then looks directly into Itachi's eyes. "I do."

That was music to Itachi's ears. This cab ride couldn't end soon enough.
Sasuke's eyes widen at the sight of the large, lavishly furnished apartment. This thing only held TWO bedrooms!? "...You know, when I saw the keys, I was expecting something a bit...smaller?"

Not that he was complaining, he was just...surprised at the size. And not just the size of the twenty story building. But maybe that was just because he was used to motels and small, rundown apartments.

"Well, we thought that you might like a spacious home." He smiles and kisses Sasuke's cheek.

Spacious was putting it mildly. And it felt so...clean, so fresh, open. It felt...free. Sasuke smiles. "I love it." Then he glance at Itachi. "All of it." But first, he wanted to get clean. The temporary dye was starting to come out. And...if they were going to do this, he wanted this time at least to be purely, naturally him. "You probably feel gross after that place ride, so let's both shower and then...see where we go from there."

It might be too soon, but Sasuke had alluded to it. That and fortune did favor the bold as the old saying went. Itachi couldn't remember who had originally come up with said saying, but he figured it was good advice. "Alone or together?" He smiles at him slyly.

"Well..." Sasuke fights to keep his cheeks from heating up. "I suppose that depends on whether or not you want to get blue dye all over you." Though he'd been hoping to make himself presentable BEFORE offering himself up to Itachi.

Itachi chuckles and shakes his head. "I don't mind, but I can wait a few minutes I suppose." After all, he had waited a lifetime before this.

Sasuke smiles gratefully as he tilts his head back and kisses Itachi. "I won't be long." Not unless the shower was even better than the one bad at the family estate. If that was the case...he could be in there for a few hours. "So you'd better be quick, too."

Itachi offers several assurances that he would be before Sasuke walks off. As he does so, of course he gives into the impulse to smack that gorgeous backside.

An undignified yelp escapes Sasuke's lips, and he glares back indignantly over his shoulder as his hands move to protect his ass. "Itachi!" That was so embarrassing! "You pervert!"

"Says the man who taunted me with sausages?" he raises an eyebrow as if to ask if Sasuke was kidding him.

"I was eating!" Okay, maybe he was teasing Itachi earlier, but he couldn't help it. The look on
Itachi's face was just so adorably frustrated. Now, he looked positively famished. And at that look, he reaches into one of the large bags where they'd tossed his clothes in with Itachi's, and backs away down the hall. He darts into one of the washrooms with the spare clothes and locks the door securely behind him.

Did he really think that Itachi bought that? Of course, Sasuke had been eating but he had been deliberately teasing him and they both knew it. "Hn." So he did the only thing he could do. He rolled his eyes.

Meanwhile, Sasuke drops the fresh clothes on the closed toilet seat and turns on the hot water. He pours some soap into his hands, lathering it as he wets his hair, then runs deft fingers through the tinted locks.

Seconds after the water starts pouring down on him, it starts running a soapy blue. He hadn't had his contacts with him, but the blue had done well enough to keep anyone from giving him more than a second glance. Counter-intuitive, considering the flashy color, but it had done its job nonetheless.

And now, he was free. He had a new apartment that he'd get to share with Itachi. Itachi was going to become a permanent resident and apply for citizenship. They would be together...conceivably forever.

Home...he was finally home...

After the expected five minutes, Sasuke towels off his hair, squeezing out the last of the water and dye-riddled shampoo. Then, reaching for the spare clothes, he notices one of Itachi's shirts accidentally mixed in. A long one, one that would certainly be too big on him. And that...gave him an idea...

Gliding down and across the hall, Sasuke's footsteps remain silent as he approaches the master bedroom. He could faintly hear the sounds of Itachi putting away clothes in there, and the thought makes him smile. Itachi was determined to make this a real home for them, and it made Sasuke's heart do some funny things that felt like jumping jacks.

He places his hand against the door, the soft, silky black fabric of Itachi's button-up hugging him gently as he slides it open just a crack. Inside, he could see his soulmate's gentle, firm hands flicking closed drawers full of clothes and holding up shirts and sweaters to the automated closet. He was very efficient, Sasuke would give him that much. And he moves around the king-sized bed with its shimmering red sheets effortlessly.

But right now, he wanted something different than effortless efficiency. So Sasuke slides the door open the rest of the way, not making a sound as he leans against the doorframe, his damp spikes flattening against it, and crosses his arms. "If I stay out of your way while you unpack, it would probably be done by bedtime." Because he was under no illusions that his presence made Itachi's efficiency drop below zero.

"Yes, I suppose." He chuckles and shakes his head. "Though where would be the fun in that. You do seem to have some sort of quota to meet when it comes to driving me crazy." The other Uchiha smiles as he turns around to face Sasuke.

A quota was an interesting way to put it, but Sasuke wouldn't deny it. "Your life would be boring if
I didn't. We wouldn't want you to die of boredom, now would we?"

"I suppose that's one thing that I'm never in danger of now that I have you." Itachi shakes his head and pulls Sasuke into his arms. "Dying of boredom seems to be the least of my worries."

Sasuke laughs softly and nuzzles his face into Itachi's shoulder. "No, I'd say we're both plenty safe from that now." Though it was time to let the exercise in masochism begin, and Sasuke wasn't going to back down now. "So, like my outfit?"

"Love it." Itachi smiles at him. "I'd love to take it off you even more though."

"I'm sure you would." Sasuke smiles and wraps his arms around Itachi's neck. ""Is it enough to get you to forgive me for breakfast on Saturday?"

"It's a start." He shakes his head. "Though you have a long way to go for Saturday's behavior and that spanking is most assuredly still in order."

Sasuke gulps and leans back a little, still trapped in Itachi's arms. He musters up his sternest face possible "Itachi, if you think that you're bending me over your knee, you've got another thing coming."

"Well, another thing coming is one way to put it." He chuckles. "Though I wasn't thinking of bending you over...my knee anyway."

Moonlight pale skin flushes a rosy pink, spreading across Sasuke's cheekbones and right up to his ears. He suddenly felt like he'd been cornered by a panther, or maybe a lion. That didn't mean that he was about to back down, though."Oh yeah? And just what did you have in mind?" Clearly he had SOMETHING in mind, because Sasuke was pretty fucking sure that wasn't a gun in Itachi's pants.

"Well a bed is traditional, but a desk or kitchen countertop can also work just as well." He smiles as he kisses Sasuke. "You're adorable when you blush." Then he proceeds to work on loosening Sasuke's shirt.

"Right..." Sasuke's gaze slides down to Itachi's fingers, watching dazedly as the buttons come loose one by one. "Do you have a preference? Or does this spanking come complete with the long shower you promised?"

"I'm very flexible when it comes to you, but I figured we might as well multitask." He slides the shirt off of Sasuke slowly and suggestively. "Do both at once, but I'm open to suggestions."

Sasuke hated coming off as a novice about anything, but seeing as porn did nothing for him, and he hadn't discovered that he could actually feel attracted to anyone until he met Itachi, there wasn't much he could offer up in the way of suggestions. "Multi-tasking is fine. I only really spent enough time in there to get the dye out." He trailed his fingers up Itachi's arm as the sleeves of the shirt slip down to his wrists and the material parts, exposing him for Itachi's eyes. "I guess I could use some help getting the rest of me."

It was obvious that Sasuke's experience was limited at best, but Itachi wouldn't say so. Not directly anyway. The uncertainty in his eyes spoke volumes though. "I'd be happy to help." He smiles slyly as he discards Sasuke's scant clothing in the way one might unwrap a precious gift.

Sasuke hears the soft rustle as the fabric falls to the floor. He'd expected this, of course, it's why he'd dressed solely in one of Itachi's shirts. But it still felt embarrassing to be the only one stark naked in the room. "...Your turn." He slides his hands down to Itachi's hips and sneaks his
fingertips under the dark blue sweater Itachi had picked out for walking through the cool fall weather. He feels the play of strong muscles under the smooth skin.

"Of course." Itachi smiles at his boldness as he swiftly undresses. "How's that?" It was best to ensure Sasuke had control over their lovemaking to some degree right now.

A dark onyx gaze roams across the sun-kissed skin, finding no tan line in sight. "...Either you were born this way, or someone likes sunbathing a little too much."

Only Sasuke would say something like that. Itachi barely refrains from laughing. "I was born this way." He chuckles. "As were you, I'm sure." He smiles and kisses him.

Sasuke tilts his head slightly as he presses into the kiss and feels something very hard against his stomach. Luckily, there was an en-suite bathroom, so they wouldn't have to go far. "Itachi, how long have you been..." He slides a hand between the, barely grazing his fingers over Itachi's heated erection.

"Since I saw you in that damn shirt." He bucks against Sasuke's touch as they head into the bathroom together and he captures Sasuke's mouth with a heated kiss.

The door to the bathroom slides open for them, and Sasuke takes a few steps back, stroking the firm flesh in his calloused palm gently as he walks back into the counter. His free hand plants itself down on the hard surface, holding him up under Itachi's passionate assault. As he feels a warm tongue slip into his mouth. "Mmmn... 'Tachi."

Itachi purrs with satisfaction at that as he turns on the water and continues kissing Sasuke. He was good at multitasking, after all.

Sasuke's eyes search through the bathroom supplies and find a small bottle that Temari would kill him later for not using. Then he notes an extra bottle laying on the counter, filled right to the top with a clear, bright blue gel. "...Lubricant?"

"Well yes, that's usually helpful." He smiles at him.

Sasuke rolls his eyes and releases Itachi in favour of turning the lights down and disappearing into his soulmate's shadow with the conditioner, body wash, and lubricant. He reappears under the spray, letting it tamp down his spiky hair as he stows the bottles in a little alcove in the large shower stall. "Will you be joining me, then?" He pours some of the conditioner into his hands and steps back from under the direct spray to warm it in his hands.

He raises an eyebrow. "No, I stripped for no reason." Itachi chuckles as he joins Sasuke in the shower. "You're perfect."

No, he wasn't, but if Itachi liked to think so anyway, Sasuke wasn't going to stop him. "And you're fond of flattery. If I didn't know better, I'd say you were trying to get in my pants." Sasuke lifts his fingers too his hair, running the soft-smelling conditioner through the long raven locks.

"That too, but that doesn't make it any less true." He smiles at him and kisses Sasuke as he runs his fingers down Sasuke's body, stroking the flaccid flesh gently. "The two aren't mutually exclusive."

It was slow going, but Sasuke could feel the soft hum of arousal building as Itachi touched him. "I thought you were going to help me get clean first." Watered down conditioner sluices down Sasuke's neck as he returns his head to the warmth of the spray and reaches for the bottle of body wash.
"The water will take care of that as I punish you for being an evil tease." Itachi smirks at him as he grabs the body wash and begins caressing it into Sasuke's body, letting the scent of green apple fill the steamy air.

Sasuke shivers, goosebumps forming up and down his arms as strong fingers massage the lather over his upper back and shoulders. "Just like that..." He leans back into Itachi's touch and turns as the exploring fingers dance down his sides and around to his front. The water cascades down his shoulders as he leans up to pull Itachi into a heated kiss, the hum in his blood growing stronger with every seductive touch.

Itachi smiles and returns the kiss. There was no faking Sasuke's response now. So he gives his lover exactly what he asked for. More of a subtle cleaning caress.

Sasuke shudders as the fingers begin dancing up along his spine towards his head, finding new places along the way where sparks flared underneath his skin. He wraps his arms around Itachi's neck, parting his lips and moaning softly as his cock twitches to life. Yes, Itachi wholeheartedly approved of the emergence of this new side to Sasuke. "We can go as fast or slow as you like."

Considering the options for a moment, Sasuke nods. "Slow sounds good." After all, this WAS his first rodeo, and he didn't quite feel up to riding the bucking bronco just yet.

Itachi smiles and grabs the lubrication. "You can put it on me and I'll make sure you're too euphoric focus on the pain."

Biting his lip, Sasuke nods and takes the bottle of gel, squeezing some of it out onto his hand. Then he squeezes out a second dollop, just to be sure. He reaches down, stilling for a moment before reaching Itachi's firm arousal. "...First, I want you to kiss me again. Before, when you were helping me ease into this...you kissed me like you wanted to devour me." And Sasuke wanted to feel that rush again.

"That's because I do." He smiles at Sasuke as he captures his lips and begins doing exactly that. "I always have from the first time I saw you."

Sasuke moans into the kiss as his back presses against the wall, shuddering at the aggressiveness of the touch. He reaches all the way down, stroking Itachi's shaft and coating it thoroughly with the lubrication. Then, a couple of fingers press deeply into the sensitive place at the nape of his neck, a rogue thumb brushing over his pulse point. "Ah! Yes..."

"I love you." He continues kissing him as if his life depended on it, remembering watching Sasuke 'die.' "As fast as or slow as you want, as I said."

"Yeah." Sasuke breathes in as the last of the suds are washed away, only the waterproof lubricant resisting the water's effects as he wipes the last of it onto Itachi's fingers. "You said before that you could...mind-fuck someone with your abilities?"

"Do you think you're ready for that?" Itachi smiles at him. slyly. "It's rather intense." Sasuke was still a beginner.

Sasuke returns the sly look with a smile. "Make me ready." On his own, he could say that no, he probably wouldn't ever be ready. With Itachi's help, though...it was another game entirely. He could take this plunge. He could let Itachi know him like no one else.

Itachi smiles as he rubs the lubrication over his fingers, before sinking to his knees and taking
Sasuke into his mouth. While his lover was distracted, he slides a single finger inside him, simultaneously shaking from the sensation of Itachi's mouth wrapped around him as he grew steadily harder, and tensing up slightly as the finger slid inside him, Sasuke found himself acutely aware of just where his body ended and Itachi's began. His hands separate, one bracing against the shower wall, the other tangling itself in his soulmate's soaked and silky locks. "'Tachi..." He pants lightly as the hits water runs down his face, plastering his own hair around and between his eyes. Itachi smiles as he inserts another finger and continues sucking. It was easiest to distract Sasuke this way. He was so responsive once the right persuasion was applied, it was beautiful.

Sasuke's legs tremble a little, and he could swear that he felt his heart migrating south. Forget his blood, the whole living, beating system was on the move, pounding a path through him. And the rapid beats helped him count the long minutes as a heated coil inside him grew tighter and tighter, pressing in on itself, about ready to burst. "T-Tachi. Please." He didn't care how intense Itachi's power was, he just wanted to really FEEL him. Wanted to feel Itachi's heart and soul.

"Alright." Itachi smiles as he sends a physic wave through Sasuke's system, caressing his pleasure receptors.

"AH!" It was like a lightning bolt through his system, and Sasuke's own power just pulled the energy in and refused to let it go as it sparked and hummed through every nerve in his body. His head fell back against the wall of the shower as his hips thrust forward into the swirling heat of Itachi's mouth.

Itachi continues bobbing his head up and down the length of Sasuke's arousal while making eye contact. His own eyes burn crimson with desire as his magic caresses Sasuke's and he continues pumping his fingers in and out of him.

Steam had fogged up the glass of the sliding shower door, but Sasuke didn't need to see his reflection to know how far the heated flush of arousal extended across his skin. He could feel it flaring even below his once pale skin. Itachi's fingers strike something deep within him, almost as if by accident, and ruby flashes in his glazed eyes as his entire body shudders with pleasure, the coil tightening and releasing all at once. "Itachi!" Along with his pounding heart, the coil of heat raced down his cock, spilling his essence so naturally that he could hardly believe it.

"That's an orgasm in case you didn't know." Itachi chuckles after releasing Sasuke from his mouth and removing his fingers.

Sasuke pants heavily as he tries to shoot Itachi a withering look. "I know THAT much." It was hard to be completely innocent when you worked part-time as a bartender. Drunk patrons said a lot of weird crap and sexual shit at the bar. Especially to an attractive bartender.

"Good."Itachi smiles as he kisses him hungrily. "Then we'll give you several more of those. Let me know when you're ready."

Rolling his eyes, Sasuke huffs out an unsteady breath as he reaches out for Itachi and pulls him in for a sloppy, soaked kiss under the spray. "Ready as I'll ever be."

He returns the kiss with equal fervour before turning Sasuke to face the wall. "Good. I'll caress." Itachi uses his magic to do exactly that. "It will take a moment to adjust, but after that there should be only pleasure." He slowly buries himself inside his lover.

The pressure is enough to make Sasuke flinch as his elbows buckle, pushing his chest firmly against the wall. He turns his head to the side, resting his cheek against the steamy wall as he


watches Itachi gently press inside him. He closes his eyes, focusing on the power coursing through him, where Itachi was fusing them together. Together...forever... "Itachi...?" His voice feels thick and rumbles softly, like a cat's purr.

"Yes, Sasuke?" Itachi loves that purr immediately as he begins moving inside his lover. "You feel so fucking good." He had waited for this moment what seemed like an eternity.

"Nngh!" Sasuke's eyes slide open halfway as Itachi presses him tightly against the wall. "...I want...you in my head." He had nothing else to hide, so he wanted Itachi to be able to read his mind freely. If he had something he wanted to keep secret, he would just put a wall around it. But he didn't want any more secrets, including how he felt now. He wanted Itachi to know how his love filled up Sasuke's soul.

That was romantic. "Of course." Itachi gently reads Sasuke's mind as he not so gently proceeds the ravish the gorgeous man underneath him.

Sasuke's back arches beneath Itachi even as his fingers reach out to find Itachi's and twine them together. He grips them tightly as he presses their joined hands to the wall and leans his head back to capture Itachi's lips and fuse them back together. It was hot and nothing could be seen through the steam around them. It was perfect, because Sasuke could feel, as Itachi's control let go, the way his soulmate cocooned him in a protective, possessive love. "Hah...harder, 'Tachi." He could take it. Sasuke might have broken once, but he wouldn't break again. Not when Itachi was the one holding him together.

Itachi had no problem doing exactly that. Reveling in the way they fit together so perfectly in the only way that soulmates could. "I love you." He had never meant those words more as he slams into his lover, claiming him completely. Mind, body, and soul.

Yes, Sasuke knew. He knew it so well that it hurt. He couldn't get the words out, but his heart swelled with the feeling. He wanted to try and contain it, keep it in, his instincts seeking protection, but his heart forcing the emotions to overflow. "ITACHI!" His cry bounces off the walls as his body seized with an explosion of pleasure even greater than the first. Everything came spilling out all at once. His release, his emotions...and a fresh wave of salty tears.

Itachi could feel it. Every bit of it and more. It was enough to make him half delirious with raw pleasure and tenderness all at once. A slave to both animalistic lust and the beautiful feelings that would make even the most exceptional of artists blush, he plunges into him again and again.

Rampant pleasure almost bordering on pain courses through Sasuke. His prostate takes a passionate punishing as his cum spurts a few last times, dribbling thickly down his flagging length before being washed away by the warm water making sensual trails down his body. "T-'Tachi..." He looks back over his shoulder, lips kiss-swollen and red, cheeks flushed with pleasure, and eyes glazed over. "Cum inside me."

Itachi couldn't have ignored that request if he tried as he reached his own climax. The intensity was almost enough to make Itachi pass out, but somehow he held on. Mostly because he was holding onto Sasuke.

Sasuke moans softly as the warm, sticky wetness coats his insides and his legs nearly turn to jelly, his backside throbbing slightly around Itachi's softening length. "Mm...'Tachi...?" He blinks tiredly, a smile curling his lips to join the tears on his face. "Love you...too."

Itachi smiles, and they continued making love until well into the night. A well-deserved spanking.
for Saturday's breakfast incident included. At some point, he had the good sense to clean them up, dress them, and carry Sasuke back to bed before his lover woke up from his well-deserved slumber.
Sasuke snuggles into the sheets of the giant bed, expecting to feel the familiar warmth there that he had woken up to several times over the last twenty-four…thirty-six hours? Was it morning yet? He wasn't sure, and he didn't really feel like opening his eyes to find out.

But there was one problem that did have him opening his eyes. Sasuke frowns at the sight of the indent in the bed next to him, the covers pulled towards him from his tossing and turning, but the indent where Itachi was supposed to be was empty. And yes, yes it was morning, at least judging by the tiny beams of light streaming through the curtains.

"Itachi?" Sasuke rubs at his eyes, pushing himself up, only to wince as a short flash of awkward pain shoots up his spine. Right, he and Itachi had spent the last day and a half here…in bed. And every time Itachi disappeared, he did it while Sasuke was asleep. And whenever he came back, it was always with…

He sniffs the air. Pancakes. This time, it was pancakes. Sasuke would know the smell of warming butter and maple syrup anywhere. Even if he wasn't a fan of sweet things, he made one exception…and only for pancakes. And that was maple syrup.

Itachi smiles as he comes in carrying what he could only describe as heaps of pancakes. To say the least, his culinary skills had certainly come in handy the past few days.

Sasuke stares wide-eyed at the mountain of pancakes and licks his lips. Now THAT was glorious. "I'm glad one of us can cook, because I'd never be able to pull that off." And from the looks of them…oh for heavens sake. "Buttermilk pancakes?" Now he was just being spoiled.

"That is the kind you like best, right?" If not, well Itachi would be shocked to hear anyone refused buttermilk pancakes.

Sasuke shoots Itachi a scathing look. "No, I'm Canadian and I hate buttermilk pancakes with melted butter and maple syrup." Itachi couldn't possibly be serious. Even his dislike of sugary foods wouldn't keep him away from pancakes.

He laughs softly at that. Sasuke would always be Sasuke it seemed. Sarcasm was a default mechanism for him. "Good to know." He smiles.

Sasuke lets his eyelids slide halfway shut, his eyes darkening as he watches Itachi approach. His head tilts ever so slightly as he lays back down on his side, arms folded beneath his head as the sheet slips down a little. "Bring them here."

"Yes, Your Majesty." He shakes his head in amusement as he walks over and sits on the bed with him.

"Hm…I think I like being addressed that way." Sasuke smirks as the plate comes closer. "Before you, the last time I had breakfast brought to me in bed, I was eight years old and had the flu." He reaches for a fork, tipping it sideways and cutting through one of the soft, fluffy pancakes. He stabs it, dips it in the syrup, then takes a bite, pleasantly surprised to find a raspberry inside.

"You're adorable when you act spoiled sometimes." Itachi chuckles as he eats with his lover. "How
are you feeling?"

Deciding to be a smartass after taking a few more bites, Sasuke pretends to think seriously. "It's strange, it's almost like I've had an iron rod shoved up my ass multiple times over the last day and a half. Do you have any idea what happened?"

Sasuke had the strangest version of pillow-talk that Itachi had ever seen. So he does what any sensible man in his position would do. He flicks him in the forehead.

"Hey!" Sasuke's hand shoots to his forehead, gently rubbing the reddened spot there. "What was that for!?

"The sarcasm." Itachi chuckles. "What else?"

Sasuke grumbles quietly as he takes a few more mouthfuls of raspberry buttermilk pancake. "At this point, you should be well used to my sarcasm. You're the one who picked me knowing that I was a sarcastic asshole."

Itachi chuckles and nods as he reaches over to the nightstand. "I suppose that's a fair point." He couldn't really dispute it anyway. "Though I have something for my sexy sarcastic soulmate."

"Hm?" Sasuke raises an eyebrow curiously, then swallows his fresh bite of pancake. "What is it?"

Itachi had never mentioned getting anything for him before. And it's not like Sasuke needed to be piled with gifts to make him happy. Just being with Itachi made him happier than he'd been in his entire life.

He smiles and hands Sasuke a box. "I bought it from a certain fairy's shop and I think it suits you. Open it." Itachi could only hope that his lover would like it.

The eyebrow rises a little higher as Sasuke pulls on a small ribbon and frees the top of the box, sliding it off to reveal a pair of silver wings cupping a large, smoothly polished ruby in the center. A delicate silver chain sits coiled to the side, the entire piece screaming expensive and definitely not a knock-off. "It's..." Sasuke really didn't have the words for this, but he would at least give it a try. "It's beautiful."

"Good." Itachi kisses his cheek and smiles. "It suits you then, even if you are a sarcastic bastard at times."

"But...you've been here since we arrived. How could you have..." Sasuke didn't understand just when Itachi could have snuck out too go shopping for jewelry when he'd been a little busy giving Sasuke a practical course on the Kama Sutra.

He smiles at Sasuke as he kisses him. "I got it for you when I realized you were our Sasuke." He pauses. "But before I knew we were soulmates."

"Before...?" then that would have put it sometimes very early during Itachi's first stay in Toronto. "...That day you found me at the park..." That was close to the jewelry store where Hinata worked. It was also the day when they first kissed, the day when they first discovered that they were soulmates. He laughs softly at the thought. "Seems like destiny got a little twisted up in itself, didn't it?"

"A little, but it all worked out in the end." Itachi laughs softly. "That's what matters most."

Sasuke's smile softens as he takes the necklace from the box, turning it over in his hands. "You hadn't even met me yet, and somehow...you knew this would suit me." The silver and red would
play very nicely with his black clothes. And maybe now he'd have something to wear with the leather that Temari always insisted he would look good in.

Placing the necklace down carefully on the pillow, Sasuke reaches his hand up around Itachi's neck and pulls him in for a sweet, slightly sticky kiss. "I love it."

He kisses back. "I thought you'd appreciate the symbolism of the wings in particular." Itachi breaks the kiss as he tries to licks a smidge of syrup that was stubbornly sticking to the corner of Sasuke's mouth. "I had to give you something to show we cared even if we had to turn you in." But it had simply gotten lost in the commotion of trying to save him instead.

Sasuke laughs, the touch of Itachi's tongue tickling a little. "Yeah, I'm finally free." Free of the system, free of his mission, free of his past... He was free to love Itachi with all his heart.

"Yes." Itachi smiles at him, loving the sound of his laugh almost as much as he loved the man himself.

"Sarcastic on the outside, a hopeless romantic on the inside." And only here, with Itachi, was Sasuke not afraid to admit that. "You've turned me into a sap, you know that?"

"You were always a sap, you just didn't know it." He chuckles. "My sexy sap though."

"Which explains why we're eating so much sap." Sasuke laughs and reaches for another piece of pancake. "The most important sap in the world."

Itachi laughs and nods at that as watches him eat. It was nice to have Sasuke safe and sound.

Betrayed. Sasuke had been utterly, completely, irrevocably betrayed. And by his soulmate, no less. "I can't believe that you're going along with this." He glares at Itachi, then at the smirking redhead. "You're helping him throw me to the crazy old vampiress."

"You need a new identity." He shrugs. "Besides, Temari was also very upset about your 'death' as well. Humor her."

Sure, he needed to change his appearance for his new identity and all, he got that much. It was still a bad idea. "Dammit..." Sasuke runs his fingers through his hair, ruffling up the messy spikes. "This is the woman who threatened to dye my hair pink." Among many...many other things. "I'm her favorite plaything, the doll she likes to mess around with and dress up on a daily basis." Daily whenever he was in town, anyway. "Do you know what she's going to DO to me!?"

"Sasuke, I'm sure that you'll still be the sexiest man that I have ever seen by the time she's done with you." The man had endured death row, but he was afraid of a makeover? Ridiculous.

"And you think that she's not going to visit her wrath on me for what's happened in the last several months?" He'd be lucky to get out of there alive! "...If she turns me into a vampire, I'm blaming the two of you."

"Well, if she turns you into a vampire, I'll become one with you." Itachi smiles at Sasuke.

Sasuke's protests become quiet as he stares at Itachi. "You would..." No, of course Itachi would. If Sasuke got turned into a vampire, there's no way that Itachi would let him go through eternity alone. It was just...inconceivable. "...Yeah, I get it." Then he snorts softly. "Let's just try not to get
killed by any vampires, then. I don't know if I fancy spending the next few centuries undead."

"Understood." He nods and takes Sasuke into the back to see Temari. This was bound to be wonderfully entertaining.

In the back room, Sasuke sweatdrops as he sees a smirking Temari with her ENTIRE kit out, professional piercing gun and tattoo irons included. "...If you even think about surprising me with ink, I'll phase right out of your chair." It was negotiable, but he did NOT want her getting all trigger-happy right off the bat.

"Yes, no surprises with tattoos." Itachi shakes his head. He did have some limits, after all.

"Alright, alright..." Too bad, but Temari could probably persuade him another day. "You take a seat, and Itachi can look over the piercing collection to pick out his favorites." She was, at the very least, getting some earrings in there. "Ruby studs would suit you, or maybe some tight silver hoops." She'd brought every style she thought would suit Sasuke, but maybe simple was best, at least to start.

"Whatever." Sasuke rolls his eyes as he takes a seat. Well, she was clearly still pissed at him. She was being even more bossy than usual.

Itachi shakes his head as he looks over the choices. There were certainly a lot of them. "I am fond of the rubies, but they might be too much of a statement." They'd attract a lot of attention and stick out. Some mugger might try his luck against Sasuke and the mugger would end up dead. "Perhaps the silver hoops."

Sasuke scoffs quietly as Temari ties a cape around his neck. "I already have the ruby necklace you gave me. That would be more likely to set them off than earrings." Not that he really cared which ones Itachi picked. "Besides, I think I can control my temper enough not to leave another long trail of bodies." He shivers a little as a fine mist of water falls on his head, dampening his hair slightly.

"Hmm." Itachi nods. "That is a good point. So do you want the rubies?"

"Sure, they'll match the necklace, and it's not like anyone will look at them and automatically think they're real." There was plenty of fake gemstone jewelry flying around, especially when it came to small pieces, like earrings. Sasuke twitches slightly as Temari combs his hair over to the left side, flattening and shortening the long bangs into a curving, sideswept fringe. That was...very different.

"Why do you like rubies so much, anyway?"

"Our family's eyes turn red when their magic activates and they remind me of you." He smiles. "It's really that simple."

Rubies...reminded Itachi of him. "A precious, valuable gem." Sasuke couldn't help laughing at the idea. "Why am I getting the impression that you like decorating me?" He tilts his head slightly as Temari starts cropping the right side all the way back around his ear.

Itachi smiles and kisses his neck. "Well, you are nature's most beautiful canvas." Who could blame him?

As Sasuke shivers, Temari smacks Itachi lightly. "Hey, away from the chair, or I'll put you in it next!" Honestly, these two were like a couple of lovesick children! "At least let me finish with him before you start trying to jump him again."

Hmpf. Who would have thought that a vampiress would be the cockblocker? "Very well." Itachi backs away and sighs, deciding he'd seduce Sasuke later.
Temari glances at the pair of earrings that Itachi had picked out and nods approvingly. "Now that you've picked out the earrings, go and entertain yourself with Gaara. The bleach is going to take a while, so I'll deliver Sasuke to you when I'm done." The man's hovering was making it hard to concentrate.

She wanted him to leave? The woman was impossible. How was he supposed to leave Sasuke after everything that had happened? Even if only for a few hours, it was clear Sasuke was terrified of her. "If I leave, you had best take good care of him or vampire or not, I will reduce you to a defanged vegetable." He scoffs and heads off.

Sasuke rolls his eyes once more as Itachi leaves. "Sorry about that." And he thought he was the anxious one. But…looking in the mirror now, he was fine with where this was going. Then he heard a buzzing just behind his head.

…Okay, now he was a little nervous.

Out at the bar, Gaara smirks as Itachi emerges, quietly seething. "She kicked you out."

"She is such a control freak." He rolls his eyes at the red head.

"She's a perfectionist, and one who finally has carte blanche to do whatever she likes with her favorite canvas." Gaara had seen this coming a very long ways away. "Also, you annoy her with your hovering." He pulls down a bottle of scotch and pours a couple of glasses. "She'll send him out when he's presentable."

"I wonder why I hover?!" That comment was a bridge too far for Itachi to bear. "Could it be because I had to watch him die?!"

Gaara pauses, then slides one of the glasses across the bar. "And we kept him alive for the many years in which he was slowly killing himself." Had he been human, the anxiety of watching Sasuke's path of destruction and self-destruction would likely have killed him. "You are not the only one who cares for him, nor the only one who dislikes many of the choices he makes. In fact, you may very well rival Temari and I with your hovering."

That was his job as his soulmate, but Itachi sighs. He still hadn't gotten over that experience and he never would. Lashing out at the vampire wasn't the right way to cope. "I'm sorry." He sighs as he watches the closed door. "It's just hard for me to let him out of my sight anymore and I'm not over...everything."

"No one expects you to be." Though Gaara was considering pouring himself a larger glass. "He only fears her because it is her anger at his choices, her concern for his life and well-being that he fears. And he is right to fear her, because he deserves every ounce of her ire." He takes a long, satisfying drink. "Even in her displeasure with his actions, there is no safer place in the world for him than right here, surrounded by those who care for him."

He didn't really want to have this conversation. Gaara had saved Sasuke before Itachi had known he was still alive and the vampire was generally pleasant company, but still. "I suppose you're right." He smiles at him. "Let us focus on more pleasant things."

"Such as the fact that after the two of you disappeared, no one had seen or heard from you for nearly two days?" Gaara smirks slightly.
"Well, there was a lot of lost time to make up for." Itachi rubs the back of his head sheepishly.

"True, but I never imagined that Sasuke would allow for such an extensive marathon." It had been quite the surprise, though not an unwelcome one for Gaara to hear that Sasuke had awakened a healthy sexual appetite. "You must be very…persuasive."

He chuckles at that. "I like to think so, but I'm not the sort to 'Kiss and Tell' as the saying goes." It was nice that Gaara was trying to bond with him though.

Gaara rolls his eyes. "If I wanted precise details, I would simply have compelled them out of you." Though he did wonder how such a trick might work on a psychic. "But I imagine that, with a partner as complex as Sasuke, it would have required many declarations of your affections to make him comfortable." Which Gaara had no trouble imagining, coming from Itachi. "So I want to be sure that his chosen partner is acting honorably."

Gaara might actually be more terrifying than Fugaku. Itachi nods at that. "How are things with you and your fairy?" He chuckles. "Sasuke doesn't know yet, but I have seen some fairy dust on you."

Aqua eyes glow with a hint of red. "They are going well. Sasuke will be pleased to know that while he was off playing the martyr, I made excellent progress in courting the fairy I have had my eye on." Which reminded him… He pulls out a small box wrapped with a little blue bow. "Also, she passed along a present for the two of you. Some silk ribbons that you and Sasuke might enjoy."

Of course. It made perfect sense that a fairy would give them ribbons. It was sweet in a comical way. "I'm sure we'll find a use for them." Itachi chuckles. "My hair is long enough, but ribbons aren't my style."

Gaara deadpans. "They're not meant for your hair."

"Oh." He blinks. "Didn't know fairies were into that sort of thing."

"She has interests in a great many things, though I believe I have dissuaded her from gifting you and Sasuke any handcuffs or sex toys." Fairy she might be, but at her age, perhaps Gaara should have expected her tastes to be a little exotic. "She is also planning on offering Sasuke dance lessons…on the pole in one of the private rooms."

Itachi wasn't sure how to respond to that. Pole dancing had never been his kink particularly, but if anyone could make him a believer it would be Sasuke. "He'd never agree to that." He laughs.

"Probably not, but she can be very persuasive when she wants to be." So Gaara wouldn't discount the possibility entirely. "Would you like another drink?" After all, they were in for a long wait.

"Another drink sounds good." Itachi nods in agreement. "Though I'll pass on the fairy dust."

Gaara chuckles lowly. Oh yes, he remembered Itachi's little trip on the fairy dust. "A wise choice." He tips the bottle of scotch, leaving out that particular ingredient. The last thing they needed was Itachi high on the good stuff again.

Sasuke finally stepped out of the chair three agonizing hours later…okay, maybe not agonizing, seeing as Sasuke had gotten a couple of scalp massages out of it, but these were some very LONG hours. Only Temari's flow of conversation, or interrogation, had kept him from dying of boredom.
What had once reached down to almost his shoulders now barely fell below his ears, and only on the left side of his head. On the right, Temari had added crimson streaks that blended darkly into the black, and the longer locks were streaked generously with the electric blue. And he couldn't see exactly what she'd done to the back of his head in that mirror, because she said that it was a surprise for Itachi. All he knew was that it was short, velvety, and thankfully the only place she'd used those clippers.

Running his hand through the now slightly wavy spikes that had half-survived Temari's scissors, Sasuke breathes out slowly. That was it, then. Sasuke Uchiha was officially dead. The contacts were back in, brightening onyx eyes to a warm, shining amber. He looked…awesome. He just hoped that Itachi would like it. Speaking of Itachi…

He turns his head slightly, examining the brand new ruby earring in his right ear. It sparkled like a star in the night, a vivid red to match his eyes. The match to it studded his left ear, the two of them somewhat making up for what the contacts now concealed.

Still, he couldn't help but worry a little. He'd changed his appearance so much… "You think he'll like it?"

"Sasuke, he's your soulmate." Temari laughs softly and shakes her head. "He'd love you if you wore a potato sack and dyed your hair bright orange, but I'm sure that he'll be panting after your new look." She winks. "Just trust me." After all, one didn't live to be her age without learning a thing or two about fashion and things of that nature.

Sasuke glances at her in the mirror. "And…you're not pissed with me anymore?" She'd gotten out quite a few grievances while he was her captive in the chair, held hostage by a vampiress with a pair of scissors.

She shakes her head and sighs. Honestly, what was she going to do with him? How could such a genius be such an idiot? "I think we both know that it's over." She smiles at him. "I got my revenge already and I'm not the type to keep it going after I've already gotten my justice."

"Right." Sasuke huffs quietly at the pointed jab, then smiles. "Then I guess there's only one thing left to do." He takes a deep breath and makes for the door, already pushing it open slightly when he looks over his shoulder at Temari. "Thanks for your help."

That was better. At least he had learned his lesson and knew enough to be grateful for her awesome skills. Because again, they were awesome and he should be grateful. "You're welcome." She smiles.

Sasuke's lips turn up in a smirk. "Now get out there and show off your new look. Right?" It's what she'd said to him the first time he got out of her chair.

What was she going to do with him? Oh right. That. Temari seizes her victim’s upper arm and proceeds to drag Sasuke off behind her as if he was a prized ragdoll for her to display.

"Hey! HEY! Watch the arm!" Sasuke decidedly did NOT have superhuman or vampiric strength, and if she wasn't careful, she was going to rip him in half! …Okay, maybe she wasn't tugging that hard, but still, it sounded nice and indignant. Though all of his protests died the moment Itachi was in sight. Because as usual around his soulmate, Sasuke's brain started to flatline a little. Especially after their recent adventures in their new bed. And shower. And kitchen. And the living room too just for good measure.

"Your prowess at cosmetology is not to be underestimated." He smiles at Temari before heading
straight over to Sasuke. "Of course, it would be impossible to make you look unattractive, but it's a good look for you." Itachi smiles and kisses presses a kiss to Sasuke’s lips.

Sasuke moans quietly as he kisses back and wraps his arms around Itachi’s neck. At least now he didn't have to worry about what Itachi thought if his soulmate was so ready to jump him.

Temari smirks and heads over to the bar. "Little Sasuke told me that his nape was a sensitive spot you found. It should be easier to take advantage of that now."

"Ah that is a nice bonus." Itachi nods at her approvingly once he finally breaks the kiss.

"Hm?" Sasuke stares at Itachi dazedly. "What?" Itachi's kiss, while wonderful, was not helping his brain reboot after flat-lining.

Itachi chuckles. Sasuke was still so innocent in so many ways, or just blissed out by that kiss. "Nothing that you need concern yourself with." After all, if the vampiress wanted to make it even easier for him to seduce Sasuke, who was he to question her judgement?

"Fine." Sasuke sighs as he rest his head tiredly against Itachi's shoulder. "Let's go home, I don't start work until tomorrow, anyway." But starting tomorrow, he had the bar basically every night.

Itachi nods as he leads his sexy shadow-walker off. He'd had a long day. It was best for him to get some sleep.
Sasuke had had enough presence of mind before going to sleep that afternoon to wear a shirt to bed. It was soft, and the buttons didn't bother him. It was also…Itachi's. And it served a very particular purpose in this instance.

He'd acquiesced to a lot of Temari’s requests, and that included a few surprises for Itachi. She said that they would help spice up their sex life a bit, and though Sasuke hadn't worn one particular item yesterday, knowing Itachi would kiss him, when he woke up in the morning, he'd started considering it.

So, Sasuke slips off to the bathroom, doing his best to avoid waking the sleeping Itachi. And just for good measure, he locks the door for the next five minutes.

From where he lay pretending to be asleep, Itachi raises an eyebrow at the peculiar behavior. Why would Sasuke lock the door on him like that? It wasn't as though they haven't seen every inch of each other anyway. It couldn't be to preserve his modesty because that was long gone.

After an extra ten minutes of fiddling, the door unlocks as Sasuke steps out, still dressed only in Itachi’s shirt. He'd taken a little time to brush his teeth, but most of it had been spent following Temari's instructions on how to put this thing in.

What he wasn't expecting was to see dark eyes staring at him from the bed when he stepped out of the bathroom. "Fuck." It was supposed to be a surprise. "I didn't think you would be awake yet." Despite the fact that, of the two of them, Itachi always seemed to wake up first.

"I've always been more of a morning person than you." Itachi smiles at him. "Not that that is particularly hard to do, but that shirt still looks far better on you than it ever did me."

Itachi's smile was beckoning Sasuke back to bed, so he glides over and sits on the edge of the bed, glad that the shirt hung loosely enough to conceal just how far he'd let the vampiress go with this makeover. "I'm glad that you like it. I was trying to surprise you, though."

"Well, I like it but it's not really a surprise." He sits by Sasuke and smiles. "You've worn my shirt before."

"That's because I'm hiding the surprise." Sasuke rolls his eyes and kisses Itachi's cheek. "I suppose there's technically three surprises, but I only count them as one."

"Three surprises, huh?" He laughs. "What did you get us three kittens or something?"
"No…" Sasuke kisses up along Itachi's jaw, heading for his ear. "They're…gifts from Temari." He sucks the lobe of Itachi's ear into his mouth and runs the tiny titanium bead along it.

He shivers at the feeling of something small and metallic on his ear. "You got a tongue ring?" Was that even safe?

"Just a bead. Temari took care of the healing with vampire blood, so it's safe." Sasuke releases Itachi's ear and leans back, sticking out his tongue briefly to show off the perfectly healed flesh. "Apparently it's great stimulation if you're…say…" He smirks mischievously. "Giving your partner oral."

"I believe I heard an offer in there somewhere." This was unusually bold of Sasuke. Well bead or no bead, Itachi knew better than to turn Sasuke down when he was offering THAT.

"Hm…don't you want to see the other part of the surprise first?" Sasuke brushes a hand against his chest, shifting the fabric of Itachi's shirt slightly and causing it to slide over the new additions that Temari had tempted him into.

Just how much had Temari done to Sasuke? "Alright." Apparently, nipple rings were included in the mix. "Let's see the other parts of the surprise then."

Sasuke flushes slightly as his fingers move to the buttons, undoing them one by one, slowly… teasingly, first baring only the middle of his chest, before letting them slide off his shoulders to reveal the new piercings there with shimmering opal beads that Temari had picked out for him. Two piercings in each nipple, done like a small compass.

"Well it's never really been my particular kink." Itachi shakes his head in amusement as he tries his best not to gape. "Though you can make anything look good and those are exceptionally well-made pieces."

A bolt of relief shoots through Sasuke. "And here I was worried that you'd hate them." He moves a hand up, rolling the piercings between his fingers and trying not to moan like a slut. "Normally they'd take months to heal." But vampire blood was a wonderful thing. "I wasn't sure at first, but…I think I'll really like having them."

Itachi wasn't sure what to say to the obvious relief in Sasuke's voice and that innocent look upon his face. "Good. I'm glad." He smiles and he kisses him. "As long as you're happy, I'm happy. Though…I hope you don't get any piercings below the waist." That's where he would draw the line. Thank you very much.

Sasuke snickers at Itachi's obvious horror. "I wasn't planning on going that far, no. I might add a few more to my ears, but no more radical piercings."

"I can live with that." He looks at Sasuke. "Are they sore?" He cautiously reaches for them. "No, they're not sore." Sasuke guides Itachi's hands towards them and rubs his soulmate's thumbs around them gently, biting back a wanton moan. "They're sensitive, though."

Itachi smiles and takes it from there. He rubs small, gentle circles around Sasuke's nipples. It seemed that his soulmate was rather fond of his new piercings.

"Ngh...just like that..." Sasuke's eyes flutter nearly shut, the now onyx eyes glittering with arousal. "Very sensitive it seems." He continues his gentle teasing.

Sasuke gasps quietly. "Well, my problem was about how hard it was to get turned on, so—" He moans softly, pressing into Itachi's touch. "So I thought maybe if I was more sensitive..."
Well, that was a splash of cold water to his arousal. "Was that still an issue before these additions?"
This was ridiculous. He was a mind reader. He shouldn't be questioning his ability to satisfy his
soulmate, but he did not like the way Sasuke said that.

Sasuke blushes and turns his head away. "Sorry...it's not your fault that I'm like this." Actually,
Itachi was the only person who'd ever made him react at all, which was a feat in and of itself.
"You're just so amazing and attentive that I feel like I should be able to react faster to you, instead
of you needing to spend half an hour just warming me up." He felt...defective at times.

"Sasuke, there's nothing wrong with you." Itachi sighs as he kisses him. "You've been through far
more than anyone should. It's amazing you're still sane, let alone willing to engage in any sort of
romantic relationship." That didn't mean it didn't sting though. "I don't mind that it's harder for you
to get going because I enjoy indulging you." That didn't mean that he didn't feel like a failure upon
hearing those words though. Fortunately, Sasuke wasn't like him. He couldn't read minds. "The
rings are beautiful on you as is everything else."

In an instant, Sasuke's heart swells up with all of the love he held for Itachi. He reaches out and
pulls Itachi against him, kissing him fiercely. "Thank you... No one else made him feel this way,
like everything was going to be okay, like he had a fire igniting in his soul. "I love you so
much...more than anyone and anything else in this world."

He smiles and kisses him. "I love you too." Sasuke's love for him was real. His words and
reactions were more due to trauma than any real failure on his part apparently. Logically, Itachi
knew that. He supposed he just needed the reassurance.

Sasuke's tongue flicks against Itachi's, then he rolls the bead against the places he knew were most
sensitive. Itachi always pleasured him, and he wanted to do the same.

Itachi groans into the kiss. "Sasuke, you don't have to worry about that." He could hear his
thoughts. "You always make me feel good."

"Good." Sasuke takes a deep breath and pushes Itachi back onto the bed as he trails kisses down his
lover's neck and chest. "But I'm still going to start paying you back for those divine orgasms, no
matter how much practice it takes."

Itachi nods. He definitely wasn't going to protest those offers. He sighs in pleasure at the attention.

"I'm sure you will." He smiles at Sasuke. "There's no scoreboard though."

Sasuke smirks as he takes hold of Itachi's hardening cock. "Are you sure about that?" He strokes it
firmly as he leans back up to bite Itachi's neck. "Because I really do like to keep score. And I think
you're about fifteen ahead of me."

"You weren't planning to catch up in one night were you?" Itachi blinks. "I'm not sure...how that
would be possible."

"Not in one night, no." Sasuke hums mischievously as he slides back down Itachi's front. "But I can
at least get a start on it this morning before I go to work."

Well that sounded promising. "How very ambitious of you." Itachi smiles at him teasingly.

"I'm sure it does." Sasuke smirks as he kisses low, tugging on the sheet clinging to Itachi's hips.
"So how should I start to settle that score?"

"Surprise me." He smiles up at Sasuke.
Oh, Sasuke was going to surprise him, alright. "Okay." He lowers his head, moving the sheet away from where it tented the silky fabric. Itachi's erection was already standing and throbbing for him. "You get worked up pretty fast, huh...?" Now, how to approach this...

Sasuke decides that boldness was probably his best card to play, so he licks his lips, feeling the bead run over them, then presses it to the head of Itachi's cock while he wraps his lips around it. His first thought was that Itachi tasted a bit salty. His second was that he didn't mind that so much. "Bigger than I expected..." At least it was bigger now that he was face to face with it, so to speak. Or maybe it was because he just wasn't used to giving blowjobs.

Itachi would have laughed if he wasn't groaning in pleasure. Sasuke should be intimately familiar with his size and yet, he was still surprised. "Y-You're a natural." He gives yet another strangled groan of appreciation as he bucks against the other man's mouth.

Sasuke nearly chokes on Itachi's length before raising his hands to hold Itachi's hips down. He coughs a couple of times, sucking air into his lungs before taking another plunge, along with three more inches into his mouth.

He tries to still his hips. Right. No matter how wonderful Sasuke's mouth felt, he was still new to this.

Taking that as a good sign, Sasuke bobs his head, running the piercing gently along the length of Itachi's cock, searching for those places he could use to make Itachi scream with pleasure. And every few seconds, he would pull it back to the head and press it into the sensitive slit there. The ensuing desperate sounds spilling from Itachi's mouth were like sweet music to his ears.

Sasuke smirks smugly. Clearly, he had learned from Itachi's delirium-inducing orgasms. He would have learned more, but his brain had been in a pleasure-filled haze half the time. There was one other thing Itachi did that Sasuke wanted to try. So he thinks back to a song he once heard Itachi humming and tries humming it deep in his throat, letting the vibrations travel upwards and down the heated cock in his mouth.

"Fuck!" He couldn't hold it back anymore. "Sasuke!" His orgasm hits him like a freight train.

The sudden orgasm hits the back of Sasuke's throat and he coughs a little as he sucks it down his throat. But it was satisfying to see the red hue to Itachi's eyes, eyes that gazed at him with avid lust as the older man's chest heaved. Finally, Sasuke detaches himself from Itachi's cock and wipes a dribble from his lips. "So, do you like the piercing now?"

"I do, but I imagine you could have done it without it too." He pants as he tries to come down from his high. "You're a fast learner though." He had to give him that.

"Maybe." But Sasuke was starting to really appreciate Temari's suggestion. "Screaming my name is a really good look for you."

"You can be a little smug sometimes." Itachi chuckles as he tries to catch his breath.

"And you aren't?" Sasuke raises an eyebrow. "You're as bad as I am."

"Well, we are Uchihas." he laughs.

Sasuke laughs softly. "Last I checked, my papers had something a little different on them." Something...Greek? Sasuke was pretty sure it was Greek. Apparently he looked regal enough for it, or something like that. Half Japanese and half Greek seemed to be his cover. Still, it was a far cry from Uchiha.
"You know what I meant." Itachi somehow manages to roll his eyes at him. "Besides, it'll likely be Uchiha again soon enough."

Sasuke's eyes widen for a moment, then he climbs back up over Itachi's body and settles his head on the strong chest. "I guess that wouldn't be so bad. We're basically in the honeymoon phase anyway."

Yes, I would say that's entirely accurate." He smiles.

"Of course it's accurate." Sasuke chuckles and leans his head down to Itachi's neck, biting at the soft skin there. "You did spend almost two days fucking my brains out."

Itachi moans and nods smugly at that. That was damn right he had.

Right now, Sasuke's goal was to get Itachi worked up again as fast as possible. And judging by the sounds coming from his soulmate's mouth, he was well on his way to doing exactly that. So, he reaches back down to stroke languidly at Itachi's flagging erection as his mouth continues to work Itachi's neck. "Tell me how badly you want me."

He arches against his lover. "Why tell you, when I can show you?" He sighs in pleasure at the attention as he tries to reverse their positions so that he could pin his gorgeous soulmate.

Sasuke rolls with the momentum, pinning Itachi back against the giant bed. "Nice try. But you'll have to try harder than that."

"Alright." He smiles slyly at him and hops off the bed. "These should do quite nicely." He deftly snatches up the red ribbons and loops them around Sasuke's wrists, pulling them far above his young lover's head. "A gift from everyone's favorite fairy."

Sasuke pulls on the ribbons, finding his arms hopelessly tied together. "I guess that explains the texts on Gaara's phone." He hadn't pegged the fairy as being so bold, but then again, Sasuke was surprising himself as well. "It's about time he made a move on her."

"Apparently, they've been making several moves on each other." He chuckles as he kisses Sasuke. "She wants to teach you how to pole dance like an exotic dancer."

That was...unexpected. "...Is that something you would want to see?" Sasuke squirms a little, trying and failing to get free. "I mean, I don't really remember how, so I'd need a refresher class at least."

"It's not really my thing, but you could make me a believer." he chuckles. "I wouldn't ask you to do it, if you're not comfortable. She's just a kinky fairy."

Itachi shakes his head and quickly flips Sasuke, giving him a swift smack to his deliciously well shaped bottom. "I have never met a more sarcastic being before you." He quickly proceeds to coat his fingers lavishly in the lubrication before sliding one into Sasuke.
Sasuke yips and scowls darkly over his shoulder, a pink flush racing across his cheekbones. "Itachi!" He was trying to be indignant about the smack to his ass, but it was hard to keep a straight face when the silken sheets rubbed against his newly sensitized nipples and pulled on the milky opal beads.

"You're adorable when you sulk." Itachi chuckles as he lightly bites on his shoulder. "Utterly fuckable." He glides one hand underneath Sasuke to caress his rings and the other he uses to continue stretching him.

With a breathy moan, Sasuke squirms against Itachi's hands. He presses down, rubbing against talented fingers as the piercings slide under his skin. "Ah! Like that!" That was perfect. The stimulation made his cock twitch and swell, and every touch allows pale fingers to slip deeper inside him.

"These rings have really got you worked up." Itachi chuckles as he nibbles on Sasuke's ears while adding a second finger. "I suppose they have their uses." All the while he continues toying with his nipples.

Sasuke trembles with pleasure, his body relaxing and opening for Itachi. "Mhm." His every breath is muffled by the pillow beneath him, and his entire back is exposed, a dangerous position with anyone but Itachi. Though he still shivers as Itachi's breath passes unimpeded over the back of his neck as soft lips suck a dark mark into his skin.

Itachi licks the love bite as he removes his fingers and replaces them with something far bigger. "Mine." His sassy Sasuke.

"Ah!" Sasuke's eyes shoot open and he arches underneath Itachi's weight. "Itachi!" He stretches tight around Itachi's length, his back bent like a bow and chest pressed to the sheets. It takes a moment to catch his breath. "Yes, yours...always..." He would always belong to Itachi, and Itachi to him...for the rest of their lives.

Itachi smirks at the reaction and begins thrusting into him. Good. At least they were were on the same page there. How the fuck was Sasuke this tight though?

"Itachi..." Sasuke moans wantonly, pushing his hips up and back as he reaches forward and presses his bound hands flat against the headboard.

He groans and slams into him. "I love you." They fit together so perfectly. It was just like magic.

Yes, Sasuke could feel how much Itachi loved him. It came through most clearly when they were like this, when neither of them was dampening their emotions. He could feel it through their bond, and he returned the feelings just as powerfully. "Itachi...Itachi...Itachi..." The older man's name was a magical chant falling from Sasuke's lips.

It was a miracle that he was alive, let alone that they were still together. "You feel so good." Itachi continues moving in time with the beautiful man underneath him.

"Fuck...Itachi, fuck me harder!" Sasuke's cries grow in volume, filling the air with the sound of Itachi's name, the sounds of slapping flesh, and desperate pleas for more, filled to the brim with profanities.

Itachi didn't have any problem doing exactly that. The way Sasuke writhed against him was glorious as he continues exploring all that his lover had to offer.

It was hot, so fucking hot. Sasuke's head spun as ripples of pleasure spread through him, preluding
the great one approaching. "Itachi! I'm going to-" But his warning was cut short by a sharp thrust to his prostate that spilled his release all over the sheets beneath him.

So was Itachi actually. He completely surrenders once his beloved found his own release.

Sagging against the sheets, Sasuke glances over his shoulder, soft dark locks falling across the velvety royal blue of his nape. "I love you too, Itachi..." He slips his arms from the ribbons, turning them to shadow for just a second so that he can turn over and pull Itachi against his chest. He didn't even mind that he had cum leaking out of his ass again. "Itachi..." He runs gentle fingers through Itachi's silky soft hair. "You're so good to me."

"And you're equally as good to me." He smiles and slides out of him. "I love you, Sasuke." He wished he had something poetic to say, but that would have to do.

Nodding in dazed agreement, Sasuke pulls Itachi up to crush their lips together, his hands fisting Itachi's hair.

He kisses back eagerly. It was all too easy to get lost in his kisses.

Sasuke soon smirks into the kiss, purring softly as Itachi's hands wrap around him, pale fingers rubbing at his nape. "So, we're down to fourteen now."

Oh boy. It was going to be a long morning.

It was just a couple of weeks in when Sasuke remembered what a sadistic bastard Gaara could be. "You have got to be kidding me..." For some reason, this seemed to be a theme with the vampire siblings. First Temari and her chair, and now Gaara putting him in THIS? "...I get that you want to have a theme night, but why do I have to participate?" Sasuke felt like Gaara was showing him off on purpose.

"Because it would look odd if you didn't." He shrugs. "Besides, the black wings suit you and I'm certain Itachi will adore them."

Oh, Sasuke was certain that Itachi would adore him in just about anything, but that wasn't the point. "Are you trying to make my job harder? I already look after the drunk students, but now I'll have to keep Itachi from murdering anyone who looks at me for too long." Which was a distinct possibility, based on the emotions he could sometimes feel through their strengthening bond. Itachi was definitely the jealous type.

He shakes his head in amusement. "Itachi might glower, but he wouldn't actually do something." Well at least not in public anyway.

"You say that like that's supposed to make me feel better." Once or twice over the last two weeks, Sasuke had felt Itachi have near murderous intentions when he came to hang out at the bar. Those had been some very...interesting nights for him. "If he tries to get me into the back room before my shift is over, I'm blaming you."

"I'll accept full responsibility." Gaara chuckles and shakes his head at Sasuke's pouting.

Sasuke shivers at the thought of where that could go. "You're very eager to encourage his behaviour, aren't you?"
Gaara nods at him. "Yes, if anyone needs to get laid it would be you." He made even vampires look like giddy fairies. For the love of all that was supernatural, Sasuke had been entirely too angsty even by his standards.

Apparently, the vampire was taking it upon himself to encourage Sasuke's slowly growing sexual appetite. And his soulmate was entirely too happy to comply and encourage it further. "Then at least tell me that you're getting laid by your secretly kinky dominatrix of a fairy." He refused to be the only one who got their sex life discussed here.

"Fair is fair, I suppose." He sighs knowing that Sasuke would never let him hear the end of it. "Yes, I am."

Sasuke smirks. "And I hear that you liked the chain treatment. Apparently, you're decently good at begging when she has you on the ropes." He'd also wanted to hear Gaara admit that he was getting some, even though he'd already gotten a download from his new teacher. He felt so smug right now. "I have to admit that she's got a lot of good ideas, she's even given me a few that I can surprise Itachi with."

He feels his cheeks burn slightly. "I indulge her." When a woman with cleavage that exceptional preferred to take the reins in the bedroom, he wasn't about to argue. "Though I'm glad you two are bonding."

Bonding was one way to put it. Hinata was also very thorough in her lessons. "I think she feels like there's a lot to teach me, since she's so much older than me." Knowledge that he soaked up like a sponge. He even found himself enjoying the dance lessons. "Though I have to admit that dressing up like a fallen angel wasn't part of the curriculum."

He shakes his head in amusement. Sasuke would always be Sasuke. He was so bashful about the strangest things.

Finally, Sasuke flexes the false wings and sighs. "Alright, I guess I'll get out to the bar." Not much point in putting off that reveal much longer, but at least he would have a short respite before the first customers started to arrive. "Though you're still just capitalizing on my pretty face, and you know it."

"That might be true, but considering what you pulled I think I'm entitled." Gaara gives him a dirty look. "It's a good thing I'm a vampire otherwise I would have had a heart attack."

And that was something that Sasuke did regret. In his efforts not to hurt anyone else, he'd ended up hurting the people he cared about most. "I know, and I can say sorry for the rest of my life, but it won't change what I did." All he could really do now was live for the future, and try to make up for a little of what he'd done. "...Thanks, Gaara. For not giving up on me, I mean."

"Well thank you for making this club so much money with that pretty face of yours." He rolls his eyes. "You better get going and I'll try to keep your boyfriend from killing anyone." Gaara knew what Sasuke was doing. He was blaming himself. He would have none of it of course and that meant he had to distract the Uchiha with sarcasm.

Sasuke smiles gratefully, then heads out for the front, maneuvering his new wings carefully through the doorway and around the bar so that he could start the pre-opening cleanup.

Itachi enters the club. Tonight was one of Gaara's theme nights. Which meant that he would be
very lucky to get through the evening without punching someone, but Sasuke would look exceptional in whatever outfit the vampire forced him to wear.

And as expected, the bar area was surrounded by giggling girls and college guys shooting flirty looks at the clearly gay bartender wearing the large mechanical wings. The feathers gleam just like the few remaining raven locks under the blue and crimson streaks. Amber eyes lined dramatically with kohl glance out across the bar from the throng of people, serving drinks flawlessly, despite the crowd.

He makes his way over to Sasuke. "They seem to find the fact they have absolutely no chance of winning your affections cute." Why coed girls were so obsessed with gay men was beyond Itachi.

Sasuke smirks as he tosses the cocktail shaker around, deftly avoiding hitting the cumbersome wings. Itachi was so predictable, though he generally behaved himself, this was the kind of night that made him nervous about having his soulmate here. "I think that they all just want to try and swing me back to batting for their team."

It was possible, but it wasn't going to happen. "Most likely." Itachi didn't waste any time in marking his claim by kissing Sasuke.

"Cheeky asshole." Catching the shaker even as he's pulled halfway across the bar, Sasuke rolls his eyes and flicks his tongue against Itachi's lips. He'd seen this intention coming a mile away. Itachi liked to pretend he was complicated, but somehow, Sasuke still managed to lead him around by his cock.

"I felt that, I can borrow those handcuffs next time, if you prefer." Itachi breaks the kiss and shakes his head. "You're not half as defiant as you pretend to be."

Sasuke raises an eyebrow as he pulls back and pours the bright green cocktail over ice. "I could do that, if you'd prefer." If Itachi wanted him to play hard to get, Sasuke could certainly comply.

"I just felt your thoughts." He shakes his head. "Really, Sasuke?" He knew exactly what Itachi had heard.

Shooting Itachi a teasing look, Sasuke moves down the bar to deliver the cocktail to the incessantly giggling girls, and pour a few tequila shots for the waiting U of T students. Then, he looks over Itachi's attire and shakes his head. "You know, people are encouraged to wear costumes and make me feel less weird on theme nights."

"Well I'll just have to make it up to you later." He chuckles as he watches him. "You really do detest theme nights."

Of course he did, because it gave Gaara and Temari an excuse to dress him up and put Sasuke on display. To be fair, he didn't hate dressing up, it was more the looks he got for it. Everyone and their mother wanted to hit on him. "It would be easier if less people thought of me as attractive."

Only Sasuke would consider being attractive a con. Itachi shakes his head again as he kisses him and smiles. Well, they could deal with that easily enough.

"Ignore them." He breaks the kiss. "They all know that you're taken anyway. Most of them aren't serious."

"I know, but that doesn't stop some of me from trying, anyway." Wait, maybe that wasn't a good thing to be telling Itachi. "But yes, I do try to ignore them. It's just hard to do that when you come in and glare at them all from the bar."
"Would you prefer I not glare at them and you be swarmed?" He wasn't sure whether to be amused or annoyed.

"Just don't scare them away from ordering drinks. I like the tips." Not that Gaara didn't pay him well, Sasuke just liked to see his efforts rewarded by people who weren't obligated to pay him, or felt responsible for him. Customer service wasn't his favorite thing in the world, but he was good at it, and that's what mattered. Besides, tips usually doubled his salary just because of his looks alone. When he was actually 'nice', they tripled it.

Itachi sighs and nods. "Alright." He'd humor Sasuke. It wasn't as though he couldn't provide for them both anyway.

Oh boy, Sasuke knew what that look meant, they'd discussed its implications before. "I know, Itachi, you have more than enough money squirreled away that you could support me if I wanted to stay home and lounge around all day." And then there would be even more when his work visa came in a few weeks from now and he could start looking for work. But Sasuke liked this bit of independence, he didn't want to rely on Itachi for everything.

"I understand wanting to make your own money." Exert some control over his life, Itachi supposed. "I even understand why you work at a job that clearly annoys you because you feel you owe Gaara. Which I can't blame you for." The red head had kept him alive long enough for Itachi to find him. "You don't need to worry about making a bunch of drunk coeds happy for extra tips though."

With a soft laugh, Sasuke passes off a whole tray of beer mugs. "Someone has to look after them, and it's a bartender's job to make sure no one gets so drunk that they get hurt. If entertaining them keeps them happy, safe, and happens to get me extra tips, then that's fine with me." Sure, there were aspects he didn't really appreciate, like when someone tried to cop a feel, but otherwise...he kind of liked all the hustle and bustle. The constant moving kept his mind occupied, and the volume of customers put his focus to the test.

"Here." Sasuke pours a crystal glass of whiskey for Itachi and slides it across the bar for his soulmate. "Think that this will help you get through the night?"

"I think that will be tremendously helpful." He nods at him. "Thank you."

Sasuke smirks and leans forward to press a kiss to Itachi's lips. "Now behave yourself. And try not to pull my wings off until after my shift."

"Alright." Itachi smirks, his voice dripping with dark promises. "Definitely after though."

"Is that so?" Not that Sasuke doubted that Itachi would keep that promise. No, his lover would revel in it. "I guess that means you have no objection to the theme this time?" Angels and demons, and one lone fallen angel working the bar.

"Why would I object?" Itachi winks at Sasuke. "You look even more incredible than usual. This theme does suit you."

"Oh?" Temari had said something like that as well while Gaara watched her force Sasuke into the wings. He blamed Gaara, though, since he picked the theme. "And how do you figure that?"

"The wings compliment you rather well." Itachi smiles at him.

"And the idea of a fallen angel, huh...?" Temari had said something like that before. It was a being
once pure, then fallen from grace and blamed for the ills of the world. If nothing else, Sasuke could appreciate the irony.

Sasuke rubs his shoulders gently as he sits in the back room, the wings still attached to his back. It was hard to wear them for so long, despite the advances made in ensuring that they were comfortable. Sure, they didn't hurt to put on or take off, and they weren't impossibly heavy, but they weren't meant for bartending, and Sasuke would vouch for that. Still, the pitch black feathers were quite something when the motorized gears made the wings flare out, which was something he'd done periodically through the evening. The girls wanted to see it, and it kept them entertained.

And Temari had watched him expectantly, waiting for him to put the wings to good use. Sasuke hadn't felt like testing the patience of the vampiress.

"I think you should keep them." Itachi smiles slyly at him as he drifts into the room. "I find myself growing rather fond of them." There was something erotic and befitting about the whole thing.

With a glance back over his shoulder, just past one silken wing, Sasuke watches Itachi's approach. He raises a slightly mocking eyebrow. "Oh really?" Well, this was unexpected. Sasuke knew that look, and apart from tying him up with ribbons and ambushing him in the shower multiple times, Itachi's tastes had seemed fairly tame.

Still, Sasuke tugs off one of his black arm coverings, made from the same material as his tight black shirt. It was all that Temari would let him wear underneath the wings. Something about extra layers messing with the alignment. Fortunately, he'd gotten to choose leather pants over skinny jeans, so he had at least some say in his wardrobe tonight.

"Well I suppose we all have our kinks. " Itachi just hadn't known dress up was one of them.

Clearly. "Hn. Of course yours involves dressing me up." Itachi did have a little habit of calling him beautiful, so Sasuke supposed it wasn't really THAT unexpected. "Alright then..." He holds up a single finger, beckoning Itachi to him as he sits up on the counter of the dressing room. "Then why don't you come and appreciate your little devil's angel wings."

Itachi smiles as he saunters over to Sasuke and kisses him. "I love you." He chuckles. "Even if you are a fallen angel. I suppose that's part of the appeal."

Sasuke softens into the kiss, smiling slightly. "A corrupted angel appeals to you, then? One whose snow-white wings have long since turned pitch black?" Itachi almost made it feel like a fairy tale, like a story that could never really happen.

"Yes, when you put it that way, it does sound rather poetic." Itachi smiles and deepens the kiss. Forgetting that a certain fairy and vampire were just outside the room.

Hinata peeks into the room, beaming brightly as she catches a glimpse of her new student putting some of those extra lessons of hers to use. Then, she closes the door and giggles quietly as she saunters away towards the bar, where her vampire was cleaning up. "They're so cute, aren't they?"

"Yes, now that Sasuke has stopped playing the part of a martyr." Gaara chuckles. "They are."
She wraps her arms around Gaara's back, smiling into the vampire's jacket and humming softly. "I made sure to give him lots of tips during his lessons. And he's become a lot more flexible than he used to be. I think I saw Sasuke's legs bending right back to his head." She was so proud.

"That sounds painful?" Gaara blinks. "Didn't know humans could be that flexible. Vampires or fairies, sure, but humans?"

"Well, he's not totally human, remember?" Because she knew he was a shadow-walker, and they didn't technically count as human, despite their very close relation. "Besides, if you train hard enough, even humans can achieve that much flexibility. He trained himself really well on his own, so I just helped him take his skills up a few levels. It won't hurt him as long as he and Itachi are careful."

"ITACHI!" A scream of pleasure penetrates the din of the now empty club.

"I guess things are going well." The red head couldn't help but smirk at that. "Should we leave them to their privacy?"

"I think so." Hinata smiles slyly. "After all, I think I saw enough to give him some pointers for next time." Hm...though maybe she should look at giving Itachi some tips as well. He could stand to explore his kinks a little more.

Sasuke lays his head on Itachi's chest, eyes closed, his heart humming contentedly as they cuddle under the silky sheets of their bed. They'd taken a couple of hours to finally make it home, not that Sasuke was complaining about that part. Though if he'd known that Itachi liked the wings THAT much, he wouldn't have bitched so much about them in the first place. "How is it that you always make me feel so...peaceful inside?" He remembered a time when everything was a raging storm filled with hail and rain and three hundred kilometers an hour winds.

"Well, we are soulmates." He chuckles as he cuddles against his lover. "Though I know knowing that in your head and in your gut are two different things."

"Yeah, but..." Sasuke wasn't sure about that. He wasn't sure if it was because of their connection, or because of the serenity he could see deep inside Itachi, or if there was something else between them that just calmed him like a glass-like lake with barely a ripple in its surface. "Hey Itachi, I've been thinking..."

"Mmm a dangerous habit of yours." He smiles teasingly as Sasuke shoves him lightly. "What have you been thinking about?"

"I'm...thinking about asking Temari to give me a tattoo." Sasuke had made sure to think about this well out of Itachi's mindshot. After all, this was the kind of decision that he needed to make himself.

He raises an eyebrow at that. "Uh huh?" Sasuke seemed to be developing a fondness for body modifications that Itachi wasn't entirely sure if he should be concerned with. "Of what and where?"

"I'm not sure what I want yet." But Sasuke knew exactly what he wanted covered up. "I want my crow tattoo covered up." It wasn't just a tattoo for the sake of getting a tattoo, but because he wanted to wipe away the last trace...of the part of himself that had nearly destroyed Itachi. "It represents the killer...the criminal that you were sent here to catch. And I'm not that person anymore." He refused to be.
"You don't have to cover that up." He smiles and kisses Sasuke. "You're not that person anymore, but if it will make you feel better, then of course."

Sasuke sighs into the kiss. "It will." It would be a weight off his shoulders to not have to look at that negative aspect to their past anymore. He just wanted to wipe the slate clean and move forward. "Besides, if I do, then I won't have to cover my tattoos up anymore." Itachi's claim on him would be more public. "I've kept them hidden because the wrong people know about the crow tattoo, but once it's gone..." Once it was gone, he would display Itachi's claim to everyone who decided to look.

Itachi smiles and nods. It made Sasuke happy and he did have a point about that last part. Who was he to argue? That and it was Sasuke's body. "Alright. You don't need to explain yourself to me."

"Thanks for understanding." Though Sasuke still resented that Itachi believed his thinking to be a dangerous habit. "So I guess this means I don't need to explain why I want her to tattoo your name right above my ass with a bunch of glittery stars, then?"

"You're probably drunk on fairy dust." Itachi shakes his head in disbelief.

"Hn." Sasuke rolls his eyes and lays his head back on Itachi's chest. "I think you'd have more experience with that than me. I know how to hold my alcohol. I WAS trained by an Irish vampire, after all."

Honestly, what was he going to do with him? It was as if Sasuke Uchiha was born to be sassy. The man just didn't know when to quit. "You know what I mean." Nonetheless, he presses a kiss to Sasuke's hair.

"Of course I do." He might not be psychic, but Sasuke knew his soulmate that well by now. "...So that's a go on the tramp stamp?"
"You really want to decorate him in rubies, don't you?" Shisui chuckles over the phone at the thought of a similar comment made by Sasuke during a video call with the family a couple of months back. Apparently, Sasuke now had matching earrings and a necklace, both picked out by Itachi. When he'd commented that Itachi just liked making as much of Sasuke as red as possible, his little cousin had blushed so adorably. Though that might have been because Shisui pointed out a few badly concealed hickeys littering Sasuke's...everywhere, it seemed.

Itachi was already regretting his decision to have Shisui on call for this. "I'm never taking you shopping for anything again." He rolls his eyes. If Shisui wasn't going to take this seriously, he'd just do it himself. Well with some help from a certain fairy, Itachi thinks to himself as he storms inside.

"You know I'd just call you again if you hung up on me." Shisui smirks, watching his cousin's face with amusement over the video call. "But fine, alright, let's find you the perfect piece of metal to pop the question with. You keep giving him rubies, so I can see a theme going on here. Were you planning on making it all a matching set, or going for something a bit different?"

"Whatever calls to me, I suppose." Itachi gives him a dirty look for the piece of metal description.

"Alright, alright, settle down. I'm sure that Sasuke will love it, no matter what you give him." Shisui holds his hand up in surrender, not willing to provoke his cousin's ire any further. "So, you usually give him silver because he wears a lot of black, and rubies because they match his eyes. At least that narrows down the field a bit. And-" He blink, tilting his head slightly. "I see fairy wings approaching. Looks like you'll have an expert helping today."

Good at least someone could shop professionally. "Good evening, Hinata." he smiles at her. "Have you come to assist me in finding a ring for Sasuke and not strangling my cousin?"

Hinata sweatdrops. Couldn't her job not involve getting between the Uchiha cousins? "Yes, I believe that I can help you to pick out a ring. But strangling your cousins isn't nice, not even when they deserve it." She would know. "Though I was wondering when you would come in, I've been preparing a collection for you to look at."

"Yes, so I'm told." Itachi chuckles at her. "Though some days, I struggle to remember why that it's so frowned on. That was kind of you to prepare one in advance."

She nods and gestures towards a small case sitting securely locked to the counter. "I took your preference for rubies into account, but I've also included some sapphires to compliment his hair, and traditional diamonds to flatter his pale skin, with bands of gold, silver, platinum, rose gold, titanium, and carbide."

"That's nice." He nods at her. "I'll have a look at them." He doubted he was going to change his mind on the ruby theme, but one never knew.

Wings flutter happily as Hinata glides towards the counter with Itachi in tow. Gems aplenty glitter from inside the case. "Sasuke is a size seven, right? If not, I can have whichever ring you like refitted." Though he struck her as a size seven whenever he grasped a cup or bottle...or a pole.

He nods in confirmation. "Yes, he is." The fairy certainly had a good idea.
Hinata beams brightly. "Perfect." Then this would be as easy as pie! Well, eating pie, making it was a whole other story.

Sasuke was going to be so surprised!

Sasuke was pretty sure that this was some sort of ploy to keep him out of trouble, but honestly he didn't mind it all that much. Sure, he had to start coming into the bar earlier to deal with the lunch and dinner crowds, but since Itachi was gone most of the day lately anyway, it was fine to have his lover pick him up at eight every night and leave most of the club crowd to Gaara's shift.

Itachi's visa had come in a couple of months ago, and it wasn't long before Child Services snatched him up for his psychology degrees. Apparently the RCMP needed some help with the cases of the children rescued last year, because more than a few were turning out to be problematic. Sasuke knew what that was like, and he didn't begrudge Itachi the long hours he'd been working lately. After all, Sasuke still got to sleep in before work, and Itachi still got up with enough time to leave, even if they didn't go to bed until one in the morning.

After all, eight until one was their time. Five whole hours when the rest of the world could fuck off and leave them be.

As usual, Sasuke was at the bar by eleven, and the tv went on to play in the background while he set up the bar. Despite Itachi's scepticism, Sasuke found that he actually liked working the bar. Most people were on the annoying side, but he brushed them off easily enough, especially since he now displayed his tattoos proudly, the crow concealed by an angel with black wings, and the magnolia in full view for anyone who wanted to see his soulmate's claim.

The hovering screen across the bar flashes and, admitting a little bit of curiosity, Sasuke turns up the volume. And he was glad he did, because it looked like someone had been busy these past few months. A small smirk curls his lips as Sasuke fingers the necklace he sported over his zip-up, sleeveless black shirt.

"One year ago, the prolific shadow killer, Sasuke Uchiha was arrested after the murder of Orochimaru Sannin, a prominent medical researcher who was found brutally murdered in his home last year by two American intelligence agents and members of Calgary's RCMP." The pretty reporter on the screen who usually smiled as she delivered the news was stern and determined today, with no hint of her smile in sight. "But, since the killer's death five months ago, new information has come to light regarding the crimes of his victims."

Sasuke raises an eyebrow. "Shisui and Itachi sure work fast." He looks into the slightly ajar door to Gaara's office. "Hey Gaara! You might want to come see this."

Gaara quickly strides over to see what was going on. "What is it?" He looks up when he sees the breaking news banner. "Well, it's about damn time that humanity caught up with the truth. Took them long enough." No, he wasn't bitter at the fact Sasuke had nearly been killed over scum like that because humans were too stupid to listen to the truth. Nope. Not at all.

"Yeah." It was definitely about time that they caught up. And Sasuke fought not to cringe as a rather unflattering picture of him flashed up on the screen.

"Accused of one hundred and forty-eight murders, it seems that this killer chose his victims rather carefully." Images of some of his victims before their deaths replaced his, circling through a
number of 'donated' pictures. "From kidnapping and murder to human experimentation and black market trafficking, this vigilante killer's victims aren't the squeaky clean, law-abiding citizens they pretended to be."

Next was a couple of faces he'd never really wanted to see again. "Orochimaru Sannin, the killer's last victim, is currently under posthumous investigation, along with Danzo's Shimura on human trafficking, abduction, torture, and murder charges related to the kidnapping and sale of supernatural species and meta-humans for live scientific research, of which it is believed Uchiha himself was a victim in childhood. According to informants in the CIA and FBI, including two relatives of Uchiha, this terrifying killing spree was a massive attempt to deliver the justice that courts failed to do for the victims of the crimes committed against them, often taking their lives."

Last on the screen was a picture of Sasuke dressed all in black, wielding a blade that looked almost startlingly like his. It wasn't a photo, but an artist's rendition of him with smoke twirling around him, almost like a pair of broken wings. "Ruthless killer or angel of justice? Who was Sasuke Uchiha? The seven volume compendium written before his death allegedly outlines massive crime networks all across the planet, many members of whom met their end at his hands." And, with a last, dramatic huff, the journalist lays down her notes. "With secrets like this unveiled, the question of who is taking up his crusade is still met with mystery, but we'll have more on this story in the days to come. So stay tuned, and we'll see you again soon."

Sasuke was frozen behind the bar, his mind spinning after the report. There it was. His story was out in the open, or at least it was getting there. "...It seems that Itachi really has been busy." This explained what his soulmate had been working on in the time before his work visa came in. After all, he had to be doing something while Sasuke was at work.

"Well, if you had a dumb soulmate, I would have had to smack you." Gaara smirks and shakes his head. "At least one of you has to be sensible about things." It certainly wasn't going to be Sasuke. "Nature is all about balance after all. But are you alright?" He looks at him in concern. "Now, they know more or less the real you. The court of public opinion can be cruel sometimes and even though you have a new identity, I know that might be hurtful to deal with."

Sighing, Sasuke shakes his head. "I...don't know." Mostly, he was just in shock. Whatever he had expected them to say, it wasn't all of this. Sure, they didn't quite make him out to be a hero, but...considering that he killed a lot of people, this was about as close as he was likely to get. "Considering that a few months ago, it couldn't have gotten any worse, I'd say that this is definitely an improvement." The stories from during his trial, though he hadn't seen them at the time and was forced to look them up on the internet later, were decidedly not so nice. He'd deserved it, of course, but the stories were still hard to hear.

"Well at least you've got a sexy psychic to cuddle up to." Gaara smiles at him slyly. "So that should make it easier to deal with."

Though it was probably Gaara's intent to make him blush, Itachi's almost constant ministrations had, in Sasuke's mind, helped train up something of an immunity to such comments. Not that it stopped him from smiling at it all. "Yeah, I suppose. Though don't think I don't know who got me on the news again in the first place. He's on the warpath now."

Sasuke knew very well that Itachi had sworn vengeance against the people who had made him suffer, and exposing what had happened was likely only the first step. In fact, Sasuke wouldn't be surprised if he heard a news story about those two old prosecutors getting arrested sometime soon.

"Remind me again why I'm not allowed to just rip their throats out?" Gaara's tone turns sickly sweet. "It seems like it'd be easier." Probably a certain fairy's influence on him.
"Because Itachi wants to destroy them himself and I'm not dumb enough to get in his way this time." Sasuke wasn't sticking his hand into that mess again. "But if you'd like to fight my soulmate over it, be my guest. Just know that if you almost kill him, you'll end up having two baby vamps on your hands, and I don't think you want that hassle."

Gaara smacks his forehead and pours himself a strong shot of Irish Whiskey. "You're right." He gulps it down. "Better just to let him get his pound of flesh. An eye for an eye and all that." He was not dealing with two baby vamps. No siree.

"Oh, good, so then I take it that your threat to turn me into a vampire is rescinded?" Sasuke smirks, refilling Gaara's shot glass for him.

"Most people would view that as a generous offer and not a threat." Gaara rolls his eyes and shakes his head again. Why was his charge so masochistic? "Though it has been for the moment until the next time you decide to be foolish."

"So...according to Itachi, that'll be sometime between tomorrow and next week." Because his soulmate had such faith in him that Itachi truly believed that Sasuke couldn't go more than a few days without doing something foolish.

Gaara nods at that. Yes, that seemed reasonable. This was Sasuke after all.

At eight, Sasuke finally leaves Gaara to handle the bar as he takes his jacket down from its hook. "Alright, I'll see you tomorrow." It had been a long eight hours, though that was largely because Sasuke kept getting distracted by what that story had talked about on the news. They'd brought it back for a debate session at around six, and it had made quite the buzz, especially with the supernatural clientele, several of whom applauded his actions. Not that anyone in the bar other than Gaara knew that 'Alexei Mires', the hot and very gay bartender was actually a former serial killer.

The vampire nods in acknowledgement. "I'm sure that you have lots to talk to Itachi about." He winks. "Or moan about anyway. Good night."

"Hn." Sasuke rolls his eyes and slides his jacket on, zipping it up nearly to his throat. "The only moans you should be concerned about are Hinata's." And maybe he should tell a certain fairy that Gaara was getting a little too invested in his sex life. Hinata would straighten him out real fast.

Gaara shrugs and smirks. "You're the one that brought it on yourself really by meddling so much with mine."

Amber eyes narrow, but Sasuke drops it, knowing that there was no way to win here. "Fine. But seeing as I don't need you to meddle anymore, you can drop it, just like how I did when you finally vamped up and scored your fairy." Or rather, his fairy scored him, but Sasuke would give Gaara points for not blowing it. And speaking of those who shared tattoos.. Sasuke heads for the door, correctly identifying the Porsche parked outside. "My ride's here. See you."

The brat was impossible sometimes. Mikoto and Fugaku should have given him a few spankings as a child, had Orochimaru not intervened. Anyway, Gaara downs some more whiskey. Speaking of his fairy, Hinata should be showing up soon.

Sasuke sidles outside, approaching the electric Porsche as he shakes his head. "You know, you're a real piece of work, 'Tachi." And as usual, the passenger side door is unlocked and waiting for him. He slips inside and Settles himself in the seat next to an unforgettable face. "I take it that you set
"Yes, I did though I have obviously been planning it for a very long time." He smiles at Sasuke slyly. "I thought it was rather thorough myself."

Thorough was putting it mildly, especially after the evening debate session. Sasuke almost felt like his whole life had been picked apart and analyzed, then slammed back together for the world's viewing pleasure. Though admittedly, in a much less negative light than before. "And the picture of me with my sword and a pair of smoky wings?"

"That was just artistic license." He chuckles. Itachi didn't see what that had to do with anything. "You didn't like it?" He had thought it was rather well done himself.

"It's not that I didn't like it, it's just..." How could he put it without offending Itachi? "It's still hard, getting used to someone being able to see me like that. Most people seem to latch on to the picture of me as a kid, or the picture of me after I got arrested. The other one was..." Sasuke takes a deep breath. "It looks...how I felt. Straddling the line between light and darkness, ready to tip over the edge at any given moment, to be blown away like smoke, even while on my self-appointed crusade." Sure it was mostly just a pretty picture. But it fairly accurately depicted how he felt inside, just in less abstract terms than Sasuke was used to using.

Itachi sighs and kisses his forehead. As always, everything would be complicated with Sasuke it seemed. That was fine though. He'd find a way to handle it. Besides, it was over now. His fallen angel just needed some reassurance. "Had I asked you to choose a picture, you wouldn't have." He smiles. "Perhaps I chose poorly, but it's over now and those that wronged you are being punished."

"You didn't choose poorly. You chose too well, that's all." Sasuke sighs and smile, leaning into Itachi for a brief moment. "So, I saw Orochimaru and Danzo's names being dragged through the mud today, and I've seen the stories online. Apparently a lot of resolved cases and cold cases are being reopened and a lot of people who'd been put in prison are set to have appeals made for retrial. You've been busy, haven't you?"

Itachi smirks at him and kisses Sasuke as if he wanted to devour him again. "Yes, I have." Mostly because he did, but also to keep his lover from thinking such things for any longer. As far as he was concerned, all was well and the guilty were well on their way to being punished.

Sasuke inhales sharply, his eyes sliding shut as he presses back into the kiss, returning it with the fiery passion that had only grown over the last few months. "Mm...'Tachi."

Itachi smiles and kisses him, running gentle fingers through blue and red-tinted hair. All was right with the world.

They were surrounded by the glimmering lights of downtown Toronto by the time Sasuke finally realized that something was up. And Sasuke was absolutely sure that they were going in the wrong direction. "Hey, Itachi? I think you missed the turn for our place about...fifteen minutes ago." His lips curl in amusement, sure that this was just another example of Itachi getting lost in HIS city. "Do you need to let the car do the driving...or for me to bring up the gps, or...get a map and read you the directions?"

Leave it to Sasuke to be sarcastic on the night Itachi was going to propose. "We're not lost." He shakes his head as he stops in front of the CN Tower. "We're exactly where we're meant to be."
Sasuke's eyes widen at the sight of the giant tower, his favourite place for looking out over the city and getting his head clear. "Well, someone's been talking to Gaara." The vampire was the only other person who knew that this was Sasuke's secret spot. "What, did you feel like going up for one of the last rides of the day?"

"Something like that." Itachi chuckles. "You'll see soon enough." He wasn't going to spoil the surprise this early on.

As they stepped through the front doors, a few stray people milled about. It wasn't the busy season, and very few people came up this late at night this far into fall. "It's the CN Tower, it's not something I haven't seen before." Though now, Sasuke was suspicious. Itachi just so happened to be bringing him to his favourite place in the city and Sasuke was expected to just...what, wait until Itachi explained what was going on?

A guard stood by the central elevators, watching for funny business that tourists and curious residents might try to pull. Sasuke knew that the man took his job seriously, after all...he'd snuck past him on more than one occasion.

"I've got us tickets and reservations." Itachi smiles at Sasuke. "Should be a new experience for you." Not to have to sneak in that was.

Okay, that WAS a surprise. "You want to eat at 360?" Sasuke definitely hadn't been inside the restaurant portion of the tower before. He usually just sat outside on the roof after phasing through one of the maintenance hatches. Not one of the safest things to do, but since when had Sasuke been into doing things safely?

"Sure because it will only be the two of us." He laughs at the other man's surprise. "Is that a problem?"

"Hn." Sasuke snorts. With amusement as Itachi flashes their tickets at the door to the elevator. "Not at all." If Itachi wanted to surprise him with a date, that was fine. It wouldn't be the first time. "Good thing it's a Friday, otherwise you would have to go in to work tomorrow on no sleep." Because they both knew just how their date nights tended to end up.

"I'd manage, even if that wasn't the case." He chuckles as they head upstairs towards the charming restaurant together. Tonight it would be just the two of them. "I always do."

Sasuke rolls his eyes, then directs his gaze out the glass walls of the elevator. By now, because of the many renovations done to the tower over the decades, half the tower was made of hippo-proof glass. It shows a magnificent view of the city and Lake Ontario as they rise hundreds of meters into the sky. When the elevator finally stops and they step out, Sasuke tilts his head in slight confusion.

"Itachi...did you do this?" There was no one else in the Sky Pod as far as he could see, and the restaurant was completely empty, save for the almost invisible staff. Not to mention the single table set up with rather lavish decorations.

"Well not exactly." He kisses Sasuke's cheek reassuringly. "I paid the staff to do it, but essentially there's little difference really."

A soft smile curls Sasuke's lips, growing a little as they approach the table, and the colour scheme becomes evident. Ruby red roses, a crimson table cloth, ivory porcelain, sterling silver cutlery, and crystal wine glasses. "Someone really went all out tonight." He shakes his head at Itachi. "I suppose this slots you into the category of a classical romantic."

That was one way to put it. "Yes, I suppose that's always been my niche." He chuckles. "You're the
"I'm more of a romantic on the inside, things just sound sarcastic when they finally come out of my mouth." And Sasuke would admit as much openly. "So, now that you've got me here..." Sasuke smirks as he moves towards a seat on one side of the small table. "I suppose it would be inappropriate to scandalize the wait staff."

"Most likely." He laughs at Sasuke's suggestion. "Though they were paid well enough that I believe they're more than willing to look the other way."

Sasuke's blood heats at the implication, but he takes a breath to cool it as his smirk returns. "Maybe next time, since you went to all the trouble of setting this up to surprise me with." Though it did amuse him to hear the sounds of an acoustic guitar playing throughout the airborne restaurant.

"Next time then." Itachi smiles and pulls Sasuke's chair out for him.

Holding in a laugh, Sasuke sits gracefully, further amused by Itachi's efforts to play the gentleman when they both knew that he was anything but proper when they were really alone. "So, what shall we be eating tonight?" He noticed that there was a rather expensive bottle of champagne sitting on the table. It wasn't his usual go to, but he doubts that vodka shots would be very romantic.

"A bit of everything." He smiles at his beloved. "Gnocchi, chicken parmigiana, risotto, and for dessert, we're having tiramisu."

This time, Sasuke doesn't bother to hold in his chuckles. "Going full on Italian, then." He could work with that. "I haven't had good Italian food since the last time I went to Rome." And they certainly had a lot of delicious foods to buy there. His gazes flicks away from Itachi for a moment as their entree arrives on a single plate. It was a generous helping, to be sure, but Sasuke suddenly felt like a star in a romantic comedy. He rolls his eyes, the raises a challenging eyebrow. "One plate, hm?"

"Yes, I thought that would be best." He smiles at Sasuke and kisses him. "Soulmates should share everything. Don't you agree?"

His soulmate could be so cute sometimes. So, Sasuke nods and opens his mouth slightly, the tongue stud glinting in the dim light. "Yes, I think that's an appropriate assumption to make."

Itachi laughs as he places a bit of the gnocchi into Sasuke's mouth. "Good. I'm glad that you agree." Hopefully, Sasuke would still feel that way when he showed him the ring.

Sasuke smirks, chewing on the first piece of gnocchi slowly, staring straight into piercing smoky coal eyes as he licks his lips. "It's good."

Itachi chuckles as he continues feeding him. There was something far more sensual than usual about the way Sasuke consumed food and he doubted that was a coincidence.

After an excellent round of feeding each other gnocchi, then breaded chicken topped with pasta sauce and cheese, and a pile of perfectly cooked rice, Sasuke bit into the soft layers of the tiramisu, then washed down the coffee-flavoured cake with half a glass of champagne. He was on his fifth glass, but he was barely tipsy in the least. And while champagne was not his drink of choice, the light sweetness of it helped to cut through the richness of the meal.
"Make sure to drink that glass slowly." He laughs softly, knowing what was coming. "You wouldn't want to choke." That or swallow the ring.

Sasuke rolls his eyes as he takes another sip of the bubbly liquid. "I know how to drink my alcohol Itachi-" He眨s as something hard rolls against his lips. He looks down past his nose, tilting the glass slightly so that something metallic catches the light. "Itachi...?" He takes another wary sip, draining the glass and pulling out the metal circle with his lips.

He sets the glass down and picks up a napkin, gently removing the circle from his mouth and drying it as he turns it around to examine it. A large ruby sat in a silver band, cradled by seven tiny diamonds on either side. And Sasuke wasn't stupid, he knew what a ring like this cost, and he also knew exactly what it was for. Slowly, he looks up into Itachi's eyes, the words lost on his tongue as his heart pounded loud and strong in his ears.

"I believe you see why I told you to drink slowly this time now." The expression on his face was priceless and positively endearing. "I love you, Sasuke. We've been through far more together than most people who have been married for decades. I'd like to make it more...official." Itachi swallows once, the words falling thickly from his tongue. "Sasuke...will you marry me?"

Honestly, Sasuke couldn't say a word. His throat had closed up tight and he felt like his head was spinning. But over the last few months, he'd learned that when in doubt...sit on Itachi's lap and kiss the answer into him. That usually got the message across. So he gets up from his seat, the ring held protectively in his left hand, and he sits down on Itachi's lap, pressing their lips together in a fiery and passionate kiss.

Itachi happily returns the kiss. Sasuke had always been better at expressing himself physically than verbally, much to his delight. "I'll take that as a yes then." He chuckles.

"Yes." Sasuke pants a little breathlessly, his onyx eyes glowing with emotion. "As if I could ever say anything else..." He leans against Itachi's shoulder and takes the ring in between his fingers, examining it closely. "You and your rubies..." He huffs out a laugh.

"They suit you and you know it as well as I do." Itachi smiles.

"I'd be worried if they didn't..." Sasuke slides the ring onto his finger, admiring it a moment longer. He was engaged. Engaged to be married. "You know, a year ago, I would have never thought that this was possible...that it was possible for someone to make me love them this much."

"I would have been skeptical as well." He smiles and kisses Sasuke's forehead. "Skeptical, but hopeful."

"Then you came to find me." Itachi had found Sasuke in so many ways. And he'd helped Sasuke find himself, too. "Your little fallen angel."

Itachi nods as he kisses him again. Indeed. Sasuke really was his fallen angel in so many ways.
Four months had passed since the proposal and Itachi could hardly believe that the day of his wedding had finally arrived. It was about three months and three weeks too late for his sanity, but it was here.

"Mother, my tie is fine." Itachi sighs, but smiles at her fondly nonetheless.

She meant well. It wasn't her fault that Sasuke had insisted on dragging his feet for whatever reason during their preparations. Though Itachi knew that was in large part due to the fact, he wanted his mother to enjoy the wedding preparations and everyone to get used to calling him by his new name. After all, Sasuke's parents had years of parenting to make up for. So if Mikoto wanted to ensure the wedding invitations and cake were perfect, well he couldn't blame her and even Fugaku (who had also fussed over his son, but in a more quiet in dignified way) for that.

That didn't mean his instincts hadn't been screaming at him the whole time though. It was foolish, but Itachi had somehow decided that once they were married, Sasuke would be 'safe' from the public finding out the truth. That he was still alive. It didn't follow any logical pattern, but the waiting had just made him anxious and he had barely seen Sasuke outside of the wedding patterns and watching his exhausted partner sleep every night. Itachi didn't have the heart to press Sasuke on why he was always so tired or to use his magic to find out the real reason. He'd respect his lover's privacy at the very least, even if Sasuke did appear to have something of a masochist streak.

"Why else would he have turned himself in in the first place?" The words leave his mouth before Itachi could stop them. Damn it. He'd actually said that out loud and in front of his mother.

"Because he’s a good person who went through a lot of bad things and he wasn’t used to being granted understanding or mercy." Naori finishes straightening Itachi’s tie, despite his claims that it was ‘fine.’ Then she pats down his silk jacket, smoothing out the creases. “Though he’s not quite what I expected when I told you to go out and find a wife and give me grandchildren, he’s certainly very pretty.” Her dark eyes twinkle with mischief. “And despite all of the near heart-attacks, he makes you happy.” That was what was most important for her baby boy.

"I'm father's son just as much as your own." Itachi shrugs at the former commands. "You should have known that if you told me to find a wife and give you grandchildren, I was going to do the opposites. Our family has never taken orders very well." This was ESPECIALLY true in Madara's case. "I would have preferred not to go through so much psychological torture before getting to this point, but I do love him and I’m sure once he’s had time to recover, he probably wouldn't be opposed to exploring the option of surrogacy."

Naori giggles with open amusement. “Yes, I suppose that being related to you father in any way is bound to breed rebellion.” Madara was the king of rebellion in their youth. “But I’m sure that
Mikoto is glad that you’ve saved her baby’s spirit.” It was beautiful to see. “And in turn, he’s set your spirit free.” Free to burn with passion and love, free to express what was on his mind without need for a censor. It was obvious to anyone who knew Itachi well that her baby boy’s opinions were no longer being kept quiet or made ‘politically correct.’

"Yes, I suppose so." Itachi nods, deciding it was best not to explain what being 'free spirited' meant in this case. When he was with Sasuke, his heart was flying and life was a joyous thing when the idiot wasn't trying to get himself killed anyway. "Shall we be going, Mother? Preferably before Father does anything too embarrassing."

“Well, he’s your father and it’s your wedding day. It’s in his job description to embarrass you today.” Naori slips her arm through Itachi’s, smiling brightly as they step out into the family estate’s small ballroom. The smaller one, anyway. Every part of it was decorated top to bottom, shining in a vibrant array of white and silver and gold. Mikoto’s design choices, of course. And quite a lovely arrangement it was.

Itachi sighs and nods. "Accurate enough, unfortunately." He walks alongside his mother. "Hopefully, he won’t say anything too outrageous during the vows though."

“Maybe, but I wouldn’t count on it.” He probably would, though, Naori knew her husband better than anyone, and not even the eyes of a select number of the extended family or Sasuke’s friends and family were going to keep Madara from doing whatever he damn well pleased.

"You don't say?" Itachi arches an eyebrow at her. "I've never noticed that about him."

Naori laughs unreservedly, her voice like wind chimes against the classical music playing in the background. The two most precious men in her life were so alike, and such fun to tease. Their sarcasm and wit knew no bounds. “Oh yes, it’s quite true.” She winks at her husband as they approach the altar. “He’s all yours, Dearest.”

"Thank you, My Love." He chuckles and smiles at Itachi. "Don't worry. I won't traumatize you outside of reason. I don't want you to faint and sleep through your honeymoon." Fuck. Itachi Uchiha was doomed.

“Good boy. And if you continue to be good, I’ll be sure to reward you later. If you’re not, I will simply have to punish you.” Naori presses a kiss to Madara’s cheek before striding away to rejoin Obito among a few of their more trustworthy relatives. Fortunately, Obito’s sanity had not taken a single dip in the last week. A record, in recent months.

Itachi blinks. "I don't even want to know." He truly didn't.

Madara merely shrugs, unperturbed by the ‘threat.’ “I’m certain it’s no more scandalous than what you and your little angel will be getting up to for the foreseeable future.”

"I would prefer not to have this discussion with you at the alter." The younger Uchiha groans.

“If you would rather it be during dinner, I can certainly oblige.” Madara’s lips turn up at the corners as two figures appear at the end of the makeshift aisle through the open doors of the ballroom. “Though I believe that you will be rather distracted then.”

"I'd prefer it not to happen at all, actually!" Itachi scowls at him before turning his attention to Sasuke. "He really does have the face of an angel."

“Well, he does resemble his mother most.” And dressed all in white, Sasuke certainly looked the part of an angel. Honestly, Madara saw white as only good for showing bloodstains, but he
supposed that the symbolism was important. Really, Mikoto had put an immense amount of effort into making Sasuke appear perfectly sweet and innocent. Much of that effort had been rather loud ‘debates’ over what he was going to wear. They could have woken the dead with their debates, and then Sasuke would have had to kill them all a second time.

There was no denying that. "Indeed. He does." Itachi watches as his soon to be husband makes his way down the aisle with his mother at his side.

Sasuke’s steps were lithe and graceful, perfectly measured and completely unconscious. Mikoto leans over to whisper something in his ear, and he nods slightly. His eyes flicker to Itachi, widening slightly as the faintest hint of a blush blossoms across his cheekbones as they make the final approach to the altar.

"It's going to be alright, Sasuke." She smiles at her son. "You look perfect and I'm sure he'll agree." How could he not? Her son was absolutely adorable today. Though of course, she wouldn't call him adorable. At least not...out loud anyway. Uchiha pride was a powerful thing.

“Yeah.” Sasuke’s eyes remain fixed on Itachi as the gap closes to a mere foot. He felt like he was a doll being put on display, but the fire in Itachi’s eyes was real as he takes his place opposite his beloved. "Hey."

"Hey." Itachi smiles as he takes Sasuke's hands in his own. "You look beautiful." He always did, but especially today.

Dark eyes roll slightly, unconcealed today in the company of family. “Thanks, I think.” Truthfully, he didn’t mind Itachi calling him beautiful, but he liked to pretend that it pricked his pride.

Madara chuckles at that and shakes his head. "Fellow Uchihas and....Sasuke's merry band of misfits, we are gathered here today to celebrate the union of Sasuke and my son, Itachi Uchiha.” He pauses for a moment enjoying showing off. "If anyone has any reason why these two should not be wed speak now or forever hold your peace. Though if you do speak, you shall be silenced prematurely and I CAN make it look like an accident."

Now sarcastic humor was certainly Sasuke’s forte. He just couldn’t help butting in a little. “He can make it look like an accident. I won’t.”

Itachi rubs the back of his head sheepishly. Oh boy. He just shakes his head and lets Madara proceed.

"Wonderful." He nods at the crowd. "Do you, Itachi Uchiha, take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband? To love, honor, and cherish him for all your days? To stand by his side in good times and in bad? Until death do you part? Oh and also to give your mothers those grandchildren they want so badly so Fugaku and I can finally have some peace again?"

Sasuke squeezes Itachi’s hands, and his blush returns in full force as he remembers a particular conversation that they’d had in his old apartment where he’d asked Itachi if he wanted children. It looked like those were certainly going to be negotiated, and rather soon.

"I do." Itachi smiles. There had never been a doubt in his mind what his answer would be.

Madara nods with approval. "Do you, Sasuke, take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband? To love, honor, and cherish him for all your days? To stand by his side in good times and in bad? Until death do you part? Oh and also to give your mothers those grandchildren they want so badly so Fugaku and I can finally have some peace again?"
Well, at least it hadn’t gotten any extra embarrassing. Sasuke knew that Madara had more than
enough reason AND ammunition to embarrass him for the rest of his life if he so chose to. “Yes.”
He looks deep into Itachi’s eyes, smiling as he shifts half a step closer. “I do.” Always and forever,
no matter what he had to do to keep Itachi.

"Good. Then I pronounce you man and well, man." Madara tilts his head as it just didn't flow the
same way, but the love was the same. "You may kiss the other groom?” What the hell was he
supposed to say?

Mollified by Madara’s slight confusion, Sasuke chuckles softly and smirk, taking the hands holding
his and wrapping them firmly around his waist. Then he reaches his own hands up around Itachi’s
neck and pulls Itachi down the required inch to kiss him fiercely and with no reservations.

Itachi smiles as he quickly returns the kiss. His father might be slightly baffled, but his heart was in
the right place. That and who could resist kissing the angel standing in front of him?

Standing beside Itachi, Shisui smirks at the expressions of deep amusement ringing the room. They
might not normally be much for PDA, but apparently family didn’t count, considering just how
passionately they were going at it. In fact, if someone didn’t stop them soon, they might end up
starting the honeymoon early. So, he coughs rather loudly. “Uh, Itachi? Sucking face with your
soulmate is fine, but try not to rip his clothes off until none of us can see you.”

Itachi’s face burns crimson. "Just shut it." He rolls his eyes at his cousin.

“Gladly.” Shisui glances at the two eager mothers standing less than ten feet away. …Yeah,
grandchildren were definitely on the horizon.

Itachi’s face isn’t the only one a little flushed. While not as deeply red as his husband’s, Sasuke’s
cheeks glow a rosy pink as he settles his head into the crook of Itachi’s neck. “…I love you.” His
voice merely a whisper, but to him, it sounded deafening.

"I love you too." Itachi smiles as he enjoys Sasuke's presence. "Do you wish to throw the
bouquets.” It had been hard to choose, but flowers seemed slightly more masculine than garter
belts.

Sasuke rolls his eyes. “Alright.” Though for the most part, the attendees were all mated or married.
But there were a couple of single people here, and one in particular had been getting on Itachi’s
nerves for months, even as he helped Sasuke plot and plan."You get the pinkie, I’ll get our idiot?"

"If I must." Itachi shakes his head. "Very well." He takes the bouquets from their stands and hands
one to Sasuke.

Sasuke twirls the flowers about in his palm, subtly casting an eye on the intended recipient. There
weren’t really many in the way of choices, but this would do more than well enough. He smirks,
flipping the bouquet around with astonishing grace, before throwing it in a perfect arc over Itachi’s
head. He pulls Itachi in for an extra kiss and laughs quietly as the flowers land with a perfect thump
right in Shisui’s wavy spikes.

“Hey!” Shisui tugs the flowers from his hair and glowers weakly at Sasuke, noting the grin. “You little twerp…you did that on purpose.”

“Mhm.” And Sasuke was quite pleased with the result.

"Twerp?” Itachi rasies an eyebrow."Your vocabulary has deteriorated horribly, Shisui." He smiles
and kisses Sasuke after throwing the magnolias at Sakura, the pink-haired witch who’d brewed
them the potion under careful instructions from her teacher.

Unlike Shisui, Sakura saw the flowers flying right towards her and caught them in a speedy swipe of her hand. She was both surprised to catch the bouquet and…not. Everyone else seemed to be paired up, which left her, Shisui, that crazy cousin of theirs, and the vampire with the puppets. “Ah…thank you?”

Itachi shrugs at that. "You're welcome." Good luck handling Shisui though.

Sasuke smiles and tugs on Itachi’s sleeve. “Come on, there’s food and cake to get to, isn’t there?” And then they could escape and get to the really fun part.

"Yes, there is." Itachi smiles as he allows himself to be led off. "Whatever you want is best."

Looking back with his eyes narrowed slightly, a twinkle very visible within them. “Whatever I want, huh?”

"Within reason anyway." Itachi kisses his forehead. "So let's get the cake and some food then."

Right, within reason. Since when had reason ever been a part of their relationship? But if Itachi wanted to play that way, fine, Sasuke could play. He could also shove cake in Itachi’s face.

Thirty seconds later, he smirks as a piece of cake gets smeared all over Itachi’s pretty face. “Is that ‘within reason,’ Itachi?”

"I suppose it was." Itachi grabs another piece of cake and retaliates. "In that event though, so is that."

So, his soulmate was going to play too, was he? Sasuke licks some of the cream cheese icing from his lips, carefully scraping more of the icing from the side of his nose and his left cheek with his index finger and licking it slowly from his finger. “Mm…it’s good.” Cream cheese icing on a red velvet cake, just like Itachi had done for his birthday last year.

He watches him with heated eyes. "It should be." Their mothers had gone bonkers over every detail of the wedding, especially the cake.

“Good thing you suggested this type when we told them, huh?” Sasuke remembered the looks on their faces vividly. The day they’d announced their engagement to the rest of the family had been a very good day.

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*Sasuke leaned against Itachi and stared at the jewels adorning his finger as Shisui drove them from the airport to the family estate in New York. It had been barely a week since Itachi proposed, and already they were being carted to the family to announce it. Or, as Shisui had put it, for a much needed family reunion. “Do you think your mom will like me?” He hadn’t met her the last time he’d stayed at the family estate. Something about her being abroad for work when all of that shit was going down. UN duties or something that sounded like that.

"Sasuke, she'll love you." Itachi chuckles as he squeezes his mate's hand reassuringly. "Most people are far more worried about my father than my mother. You'll be fine."

“Your dad, I get. I’ve already pissed him off once and I think we’ve…mostly resolved our issues.” At least, Sasuke thought they had. Maybe it was because he looked so much like Madara’s little
brother. That might have helped. But Itachi’s mom…this was the woman who could handle Madara Uchiha. He was expecting her to be at least as scary, if not scarier. “I’ve never met your mom before, though.”

“As far as my mother is concerned, you’re my soulmate.” Itachi kisses his cheek. “So you make me happy. Which makes her happy.” He pauses for a moment to add some suspense. “Failure to keep me happy though would likely result in the claws coming out and not even my father could save you then.”

“Well…” Sasuke glances down for a moment at Itachi’s relatively calm lap. “I know how to keep at least one part of you happy.”

“That is very true.” Itachi purrs with approval.

Shisui coughs suggestively. “We’re five minutes from home. Do you think you two can keep yourselves from jumping each other in MY car long enough to get there?”

“No.” Itachi shakes his head and glares at Shisui. “The fact we might mess up your precious car only adds to the thrill.”

That was when Shisui stepped on the gas, so to speak.

Sasuke smirks as they walk into the estate, having made the last leg of the journey in record time so that Shisui’s car wouldn’t end up a casualty of their…passion. “We’re so mean to Shisui.” Their cousin really didn’t deserve it, but it was so much fun to tease Shisui a little. Almost as much fun as it was to watch Shisui tease Itachi.

“He was the one that told me to get laid.” Itachi shrugs as he wraps his arm around Sasuke and they head inside. "Shisui can deal with the consequences."

Yeah, but even Sasuke drew the line at having sex in someone else’s car. “You’re a little evil sometimes, you know that right?”

"Sasuke, I was a CIA Agent." Itachi shoots him a bemused look. "Were I always a perfect angel, I never would have selected such a vocation in the first place. Even if I am retired now, you should expect me to continue mindfucking people as long as I draw breath. I am my mother’s son, after all."

And yet, Itachi called Sasuke the angel. “And you say that I shouldn’t be scared of your mother…” Because Sasuke totally needed someone else to mindfuck him in the NOT fun way. “You do realize that our family is batshit crazy?”

He gives him a hurt look. "I'm well aware, but I'm also aware my mother wouldn't do it to someone who doesn't deserve it." He sighs and drags Sasuke into the next room. "Which is not you." Itachi briefly waits for Shisui to follow and takes a quick headcount. "Mother, this is Sasuke. My soulmate and my fiancé." There. Perhaps it was best to just get it out in the open quickly and not beat around the bush? What was the proper etiquette for a situation like this?

Dead…silence…

For a moment Shisui wants to drive his palm into his face. Or better yet, smack his crazy little cousin upside the head. That was NOT how you announced an engagement to your family. You did
it slowly, with tact, over dinner and by telling your parents how in love you are first. Not by blurting it all out at once. But at least it was out there now.

And two seconds later, two excited and high-pitched squeals shatter the silence, and two warm, soft female bodies crash into the two young men holding hands, squeezing the licing daylights out of them.

Purplish hair hanging in soft waves down her shoulders, Naori beams at her son with happy tears in her eyes. “Oh, my baby is all grown up and finding his soulmate and getting engaged! Mikoto! Our babies are going to be married!”

"Mother, I love you, but I can't breathe." Itachi squirms. "I don't think that Sasuke can either." That would be ironic to escape death row only to be killed by a hug.

Naori huffs softly and releases Itachi, only to switch places with Mikoto and wrap Sasuke in a hug instead. “Oh, you’re just so precious, aren’t you? My son has such good taste.”

Sasuke blushed under the attention and rubs the back of his head sheepishly, and with great difficulty. “Ah…thank you?”

Well, if nothing else their mothers were likely going to get along amazingly well. If anything, they might be getting along a little too well, Itachi thinks to himself with a sigh.

Mikoto starts barraging them with a bunch of excited questions. Naori wasn’t far behind though. So that's how they spent the next six hours debating wedding colors and what kind of cake would be best.

Needless to say, they’d gone with what Itachi had chosen for Sasuke’s birthday cake, since as far as they could tell, it was the only kind of cake he could stand.

Cake that he was perfectly fine with licking off his face right in front of Itachi, knowingly teasing him and getting him worked up. It would be much more fun later.

"You're a horrible tease." Itachi rolls his eyes at the gesture. "You know that right?" He'd just have to punish Sasuke later, he decides.

“And you love it.” Pretending otherwise would make Itachi the foolish one, not him. Sasuke’s eyes flicker up coyly towards Itachi’s. “You wouldn’t have married me if you didn’t.”

"I suppose there may be some merit to that theory." Itachi kisses his forehead.

Sasuke rolls his eyes and presses a finger to his lips. “Your game is slipping, Itachi.” He smirks softly. “You missed.”

"I didn't miss." He chuckles. "I was just going where you would least suspect it." "Is that so…?" Sasuke’s eyelids lower suggestively. “Then perhaps I should leave you to work on your strategy and go get something to eat. I’m…starving.”

He shakes his head and pulls Sasuke to the newest refreshment table. "I think we can manage that just fine." He could be such a sassy thing when he had the mind. That was alright though. Itachi was already plotting his revenge for their honeymoon.
“Hn.” Sasuke smirks. At least Itachi was frustrated. That would make for a much more interesting evening than they would have had otherwise. “Keep telling yourself that.”

"You're not going to be able to walk properly for weeks after I'm done with you." Itachi gives him a dirty look.

Yeah, that’s about what Sasuke expected. “That’s fine. Gaara gave me the time off, and my project with Shisui is done.” Sasuke wraps his arms around Itachi’s neck and presses a heated kiss to his soulmate’s lips. “So for the next few weeks, I’m all yours.”

He kisses him. "Good." Itachi smirks at his new husband. "I'm VERY glad to hear that."

“You know…I was working hard on a project before the wedding. I barely got it done in time.” It was something that Sasuke hadn’t told Itachi yet. But he’d wanted to get it done before getting married, so he could go into this with no regrets. “But I’ll tell you what it is later. Shisui and I have been working on it for months.”

"...You and Shisui have been working on it?" Well, now Itachi was mildly to moderately terrified. "I suppose that does explain why you've been so exhausted.."

Yeah, it had definitely been exhausting work, but Sasuke was proud of what they’d done. “Mhm, and now it’s all done. But like I said, I’ll tell you about it later. For now, I’ll let the anticipation do its work.”

He raises an eyebrow at that. "Alright." Then he settles himself into a chair by Sasuke’s side and begins to eat. "You're sadistic sometimes though."

“And that was also something you knew before marrying me.” Sasuke wondered if maybe he should take Itachi to a psychiatrist to figure out if that was a worrying sign. “You have a very unhealthy attraction to sadistic, sarcastic teases.”

"Yes, I have to admit that it is very unhealthy." Itachi sighs and shakes his head. "Though I'm afraid that it is too late to do much about that."

“Then I suppose it’s a good thing I have an equally unhealthy attraction to arrogant and annoying men who can mind-fuck people six ways to Sunday.” Because the seventh was reserved solely for him. Sasuke smirks and kisses Itachi’s cheek, then goes about popping breaded shrimp into his mouth. Mmm…spicy.

Itachi nods at him. "Yes, I suppose it all works out rather nicely when you put it that way." He chuckles as he eats with the love of his life.

Sasuke leans into his husband’s side, warm and content and surrounded by family. He didn’t mind the fairly small size of the wedding, not at all. But it was nice to be surrounded by the people who cared for him on the day he married the man who loved him the most.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

celestia193's Author's Note: Alright, we have a honeymoon lemon for you all, then one of the last doses of mild angst before these two get their much deserved happily ever after.

It was nostalgic, smelling the scent of the ocean as it wafted through the trees. It had taken three planes and a ferry ride to get here, but Sasuke was more than happy to have passed over familiar places from his childhood when they caught the last flight in Vancouver.

And then there was this place. Sasuke hadn’t seen this cabin since he was a kid, but the century-old building on Gabriola was still standing, perfectly intact and completely operational. As soon as he crossed the threshold, it brought back all of the good memories from when he was little, memories that he could finally share with Itachi. “I missed this place.”

"It is lovely." Itachi smiles at Sasuke as he caresses his cheek briefly before readjusting his suitcase in his other hand. That thing was heavy after all. "Not nearly as lovely as you when you weren't trying to give me a heart attack, of course. Still, it's beautiful and I'm sure that the bedroom will be even more glorious than the rest of the house. At least I hope that is the case for your sake, since you'll be spending so much time there."

“Of course. I do plan to get some sleep between all of the canoeing and hiking and wake-boarding.” The corners of Sasuke’s lips turn up into a soft smirk. “There’s so much to do here on the west coast, after all.” He turns his back to Itachi and saunters away towards the bedroom, pulling his wheeled suitcase behind him.

Itachi glowers at that as he wastes no time in slapping Sasuke's ass for that comment. "Perhaps we'll explore such options more in-depth on another visit." Cheeky bastard. He knew exactly what Itachi meant.

Sasuke laughs sharply, his hand reaching back to rub his slightly sore ass. He looks over his shoulder with a wicked smirk. “Straight to the fun part, then…eh, Itachi?”

"No, you taunted me during our wedding for hours beforehand." He shakes his head and sets his suitcase down, making Sasuke do the same. "I believe that I have been more than patient enough." That and while it was out of character, Itachi throws Sasuke over his shoulder and proceeds to drag him off caveman style. After all, there was something about carrying the 'bride' over the threshold. Perhaps this was simply a more masculine version of that.

The laughter continues as Sasuke pounds playfully on Itachi’s back. “What the hell, Itachi? Since when did you turn into a caveman?”

"There are consequences for pulling a tiger's tail, Sasuke." He shakes his head as he carries Sasuke towards the bedroom. "A lesson which I will ensure is DRILLED into that cute ass of yours sooner rather than later."

Oh, and did Sasuke ever love to pull the tiger’s tail. So what if he was a bit of an adrenaline
junkie? It was just so funny to watch. "Oh yeah? You and what army?" The light dims around them as their suitcases disappear from sight, along with the whole rest of the giant three-bedroom cabin, save for Sasuke’s old room, complete with queen-sized bed.

"I think being a mind reader, I should count as an army onto myself.” Itachi chuckles as he playfully throws Sasuke onto the bed and locks the door behind them.

Sasuke bounces once and twists over onto his hands and knees, watching Itachi with an eager light in his eyes. A locked door could never actually stop him in the dark, but he was more interested in Itachi than in escaping. “If you're an army, then what does that make me?”

"A masochist, I think." Itachi nods as he pulls something out of his pocket. Well, two somethings. "I guess we'll find out though." A silken blind fold and some fuzzy handcuffs.

Dark eyes widen in surprise, then narrow in amusement. Did Itachi really thing that mere antique handcuffs could hold him for long? “Oh yeah?” Sasuke’s smirk widens and he crooks a finger at Itachi, beckoning him to the bed. “I think you're trying to prove something.”

"That's true, but there will be no trying." Itachi joins him on the bed and quickly wraps the blindfold around Sasuke's eyes. "Only doing."

Luckily, Sasuke could hear as well as he could see, and his blindfolded eyes follow the sound of Itachi’s voice. The cloth slides softly over his skin. His lips find Itachi’s throat and he kisses along the smooth skin. “I look forward to it.” He slides off the leather jacket he’d changed into before setting off on this little adventure. Sure, the suit was nice, but there was no way he was wearing a white suit on planes and into airports or on a ferry. Anything could have happened to it.

"I'm sure you do." Itachi watches with delight as Sasuke begins to undress, but it was far too slow for him. He had been waiting for this throughout the entire wedding and journey here. "I'll buy you new ones." He quickly yanks off the rest of Sasuke's clothes in one fell swoop and begins working on his own. Honestly, they were nice clothes but far more trouble than they were worth at the moment.

Sasuke rolls his eyes behind the blindfold and laughs softly as the cool air caresses his heated and growing erection. “This must be part of your master plan to be the one picking out my clothes instead of Temari.” He leans back feeling around for the handcuffs as he hears Itachi’s clothes drop to the floor piece by soft and silky piece. His fingers close around them and he twirls them around on a single finger. “Didn’t you have plans for these?”

"She does have exceptional taste, but yes I'll admit that has something to do with it." He watches Sasuke twirl the handcuffs and quickly snatches them once he was stripped. "Yes, I have several plans for these."

“I see.” Sasuke moves forward, setting himself up in Itachi’s lap and pressing kisses along his skin. Pale, rosy lips curl with a smug excitement as Sasuke holds his hands out for Itachi. “Then please, feel free to implement those plans…Sir.”

"I’m glad that you're accepting your punishment like a good angel." He slaps the cuffs on Sasuke quickly before adjusting his position on the bed until his arousal was by Sasuke's mouth. "Now suck."

Sasuke’s lips wrap around Itachi’s cock without hesitation, his tongue working into the slit at the head of Itachi’s erection. It was easy, it came so naturally, and he lets the hard flesh slip bit by bit down his throat.
Surprised by the fact Sasuke was actually being obedient, Itachi groans in pleasure. He almost forgot the next part. "Good angel." It was hard to think of anything else when your husband was doing such wicked things with his mouth though. "Of course, I wouldn't entirely neglect you." He uses his magic to make Sasuke feel what he felt.

Dark eyes widen behind the blindfold and a pleasurable groan vibrates through Sasuke’s throat as he sucks. All of his nerves felt like they’d been lit up with a pleasurable fire, and one that he knew very well now. “‘Tachi…” His soulmate’s name was a muffled groan around the dripping cock in his mouth.

"Just like that." Itachi's voice was little more than a serious of lustful moans at this point, but he didn't care. "Don't stop." He only amplifies the magic's intensity.

Sasuke’s whole body shudders with pleasure, and he can barely contain himself as he grazes his teeth along the sensitive skin and presses the bead of his tongue piercing where he knew Itachi secretly loved it. His own length throbed and dripped pearly drops onto the covers of the bed. And his face presses into Itachi’s lap, hungrily sucking on Itachi’s heated arousal.

Itachi surrenders to the feeling of Sasuke's lips against his heated skin. It was too much to hold back, though he doubted Sasuke would complain. "It ought to be illegal to be that good at such lewd acts." He pants.

After taking a few moments to swallow, Sasuke detaches himself and lifts himself to sit on Itachi’s lap. He presses his bound hands to Itachi’s chest, his own body still humming with pleasure as he perched on the edge of release. “You taught me well.”

"I suppose I did." Itachi smirks as he squeezes the curve of Sasuke's backside with one hand, slipping his fingers inside to stretch Sasuke open, and his other slowly strokes his lover.

Sasuke moans softly, his back arching with pleasure as his release spills all over Itachi’s hand and stomach. “‘Tachi…” He presses a kiss to Itachi’s lips, his bound hands caught between them as he rolls his hips back and forth on Itachi’s lap, forcing the fingers a little deeper every time.

Itachi didn't mind in the slightest as he continues toying with him. He captures his husband's lips in a heated kiss and then gives his backside a harsh swat while sending Sasuke mental images of their other times staying in together. Particularly, the ones where the other man's face had been pressed down into some well placed pillows.

A shiver of pleasure with a slight edge of pain races through Sasuke’s nerves, but he chuckles nonetheless as he pulls back to take a breath. “You really like the view of my ass in the air, don’t you?”

He swats him again. "In my defense, who wouldn't?” It was a very well shaped backside.

Sasuke yips at the second swat, but complies with the implied request. He slides from Itachi’s lap and kneels on the bed, bending over to press his elbows into the fluffy pillows. “Then come here and appreciate it.” His hips sway slightly, taunting Itachi into action.

Itachi chuckles. He must have driven Sasuke crazy if he was willing to skip to dessert this quickly. "I think that sounds like a delightful idea." So he doesn't waste time sheathing himself deeply inside his lover.

Sasuke pants harshly as his back bends like a drawn bow and rolls his hips as he presses back against Itachi, adjusting as quickly as he can to the intrusion. “Yes…just like that!”
"Fuck." Itachi groans in pleasure as he quickly loses all pretense of control and drives into his lover with all of the promise of pounding lessons about the consequences of Sasuke’s cheeky mouth into that gorgeous ass.

It felt as though it had been ages since Sasuke had last been loved by Itachi like this. There had been too many late nights and busy days to count. Too many of the little things keeping them apart. But now…they really did have the rest of their lives together. For each other.

Desperate moans spill from Sasuke’s lips and his fingers tighten on the pillowcases, scrunching up the expensive fabric. His nerves still tingled from the mind-fucking he’d just received, and everything just felt like it was spinning out of control. He could hear the bed creaking, the frame thumping against the wall. He could feel Itachi’s hands firmly gripping his hips as his husband pounded faster and harder, and drove him towards the brink of insanity.

But it was a beautiful insanity, and one that he never wanted cured. “Itachi!”

"Sasuke!" Itachi slams into him. The bed was shaking underneath them, but he couldn't be bothered to care. It was all leading towards something glorious. A feeling that regrettably he hadn't been in able to indulge in for far longer than he wanted to admit. Though he was most assuredly going to make up for lost time now.

Not quite back up to another full orgasm yet, Sasuke’s dry orgasm ripped through him with the almost painful stimulation of his prostate. “Itachi!” He breathes heavily, the world spinning briefly as he presses his shoulders into the pillows and looks back, his face half buried in the fluffy softness.

One ruby eye gazes back at Itachi and Sasuke sighs softly. “Itachi…I love you, Itachi.” And truer words were never spoken.

Itachi slowly slides out of him and kisses Sasuke. "I love you too." And he meant every word of it.

Sasuke rolls over onto his back and wraps his legs around Itachi’s waist, pulling his soulmate close enough to kiss properly. “…So, best day of your life?” Because it most assuredly was the best day of Sasuke’s.

"Mmm of course." He kisses him back without hesitation.

As Sasuke melts into the passionate, tender kiss…he knew. He knew that nothing would ever top this. Nothing.

Best…day…ever.

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After innumerable days and countless rounds of sex everywhere the two of them could reach, Sasuke’s body pulsed with a pleasant, throbbing ache. Walking was, of course, not an option since he could barely feel his legs. But Itachi had promised that anyway, and Sasuke could hardly complain about all of the meals in bed or being carried to the bathroom to wash off, or into the jacuzzi tub to relax.

He gazes at the slight welts on his wrists where handcuff mode had been activated more than once. He didn’t mind, of course. Itachi was just very…enthusiastic about punishing his ‘angel’ for all of the teasing he’d done at their wedding.
Their wedding…

The words make Sasuke smile as he runs his fingers through Itachi’s long, silky hair. He liked it when Itachi did it to him, and he tried to return the favor in kind. His soulmate was so wonderful, so beautiful, so understanding when it came to what Sasuke needed. And so, Sasuke hoped that he would understand now, too. “Hey…Itachi?”

Itachi was enjoying Sasuke's closeness, when his lover actually said something. "Yes?" He looks at him curiously.

Alright, now for the delivery. Gentle…was the keyword. “So…I told you that Shisui and I did some plotting between our engagement and the wedding…”

"Yes, you did mention that.” In all honesty, Itachi had forgotten about the matter entirely. "Should I be concerned?"

“No, nothing bad happened.” At least, Sasuke didn’t consider any of it to be bad. “I just thought that since you’ve been plotting the systematic demise of every person who tried to have me killed, that we would work the court of public opinion in your favor. So Shisui is going to publish a book for me. A book about my life.”

He hadn't been expecting that. "I see.” In all honesty, he wasn't entirely sure how much he trusted the court of public opinion. "I wish you hadn't subjected yourself to reliving everything for the sake of writing it, but I hope it provided you with some sense of closure." He kisses his lover's cheek.

“It did, and it was hard to write, but…I don’t have to worry about any of that anymore.” Sasuke smiles softly. “Besides, public opinion started shifting thanks to you. I’ve seen the news reports, all of the speculation about what was going on behind the scenes. People’s beliefs are changing, as impossible as it might seem. And it’s all because you believed in me.”

"Good." He smiles and runs his fingers through Sasuke's dark locks. "I'm glad that's the case."

“So am I.” It also meant that Sasuke had broken yet another of the chains still binding him to his horrific past. "The fight is almost over, and everything I knew is now in those books.” He smiles softly. “And now I don’t have nightmares anymore.” No more waking up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, shaking from fear upon remembering something he felt, something he did.

He tilts his head at that. "I'm glad you don't have nightmares anymore." Itachi smiles at him. "That was quite the fast recovery. Most people who experience even a fraction of your trauma are plagued by such things for the rest of their lives."

“Yeah, but…I figured that fifteen years was more than enough time to torture myself with them. So I…stopped them.” Sasuke just…didn’t want the pain anymore. He didn’t want to hurt anymore. “And now I can focus on you instead, on the life we’re going to build together.”

"Good.” Itachi smiles at him. "I'm glad." Of course, he had no real way of knowing just how literal Sasuke was being. "We'll just keep moving forward together then."

Okay, Itachi was happy, good. Sasuke didn’t want to keep secrets from him, but he’d been sitting on this one for over a month now, and it was time to break it to Itachi gently. “And…about how I did it. I have a small confession to make.”

Why didn't Itachi like the way Sasuke said that? "Confession?" He frowns. "Sasuke, you've already made plenty of those. I don't hold what you did before we got together against you. You know that."
Sasuke swallows nervously, but holds his ground. “No…this was a couple of weeks before our wedding. I just wanted to make sure that I was…better before we got married. I wanted to be the person you saw in me, the good person who loves you more than anything, and not the dark and depressed mess that I used to be.” And now…he felt like he was, like the demons of his past were just that…in his past.

"I don't understand how Shisui could help you with such a thing." Itachi sighs and shakes his head. "Sasuke, I love you. Your past doesn't decrease how much I love you to any degree and it doesn't prevent you from loving me to full capacity."

“I know, but it made me scared to express it in full. It made me want to hold back, curl up, and disappear.” And Sasuke hated that part of himself, hated the part of him that was so traumatized, so weak. “…I know what you let Shisui do to me after I was almost killed. I know that my memories of that day were replaced.” He couldn’t remember what happened, but Shisui had admitted what he’d done. And honestly, Sasuke didn’t blame him for it.

His eyes narrow. "Shisui told you?" Itachi knew that he should be apologetic about it, but he couldn't bring himself to regret it. "I felt what you felt that day, Sasuke. I wanted to spare you from that."

“I know, it must have been…” Well, even if Sasuke didn’t remember it, he could vaguely imagine the sort of low he must have sunk to, the sort of darkness that had filled his heart. “I don’t blame either of you for it. You made the right decision. After everything else…I think that if I could remember that…it would have destroyed me.” There was so much that could have destroyed him. “So…yes, the two of you were right. That’s where I got my inspiration from.”

"..." It all clicked into place. "How much did you have him erase? How far back?" It was one thing to shift the tone of a recent memory, it was another completely to erase many bad ones that had occurred years ago. The former was difficult enough, but the latter was almost impossible. It only took one wrong move to be driven into insanity. The most minuscule of mistakes could have drastic consequences.

Sasuke recoils slightly, tugging at the covers of the bed anxiously as he tries to dodge the direct question. “…We did it in increments over the course of a couple of weeks so that nothing bad happened, and Shisui was always careful to stop if I started feeling even a little strain. He took good care of me, Itachi. And it was my choice. And I didn’t want to lie to you about it, even by omission.”

"Sasuke, for the love of all that is holy don't try to make this seem right." He clenches his fists. The elder Uchiha didn't know how to process this. Any of this. Everything had seemed to be going so perfectly and then, Sasuke had pulled the rug out from right underneath him. "I realize that it makes me a hypocrite and I will eventually move past it because I love you and I know you did it because you wanted to make me happy.” He was not happy though. "This has become something of a pattern for us though. Making big decisions without consulting one another. It's not healthy." God did he need a drink.

Itachi had every right to be angry, Sasuke knew that, but none of this was Shisui’s fault. Sasuke was the one who’d made the request. The responsibility lay solely with him. “…I know. But it wasn’t healthy for me to remember the things that happened to me. I’ve been holding onto the memories for years and it was time to let go.”

Gritting his teeth and trying to remain calm, Itachi grips the bedsheets and breathes deeply. “How far back?”
Sasuke sighs and closes his eyes. “…Fifteen years.” That’s how far he’d gone back. “From the day I was kidnapped to the day I was rescued. And...the details of all of the murders I committed. He left everything else in between alone.” He’d had Shisui essentially wipe his slate clean of all the dirt and grime that had accumulated on it. “…I couldn’t keep them, Itachi. I couldn’t keep those memories.”

A failure. That's exactly what Itachi felt like. "I didn't want you to keep them, but I can't lie. You risked your sanity to get rid of them and plotted with my cousin behind my back to so." That burned. "I suppose this must be akin to what you felt when you realized what Shisui and I had done to save you. A taste of my own medicine, I suppose." He wasn't good enough to help Sasuke. No, he had turned to Shisui for that. Nor was he apparently worthy of being consulted and being angry made him a hypocrite of the highest order.

“No.” Hesitantly, Sasuke reaches out to cup Itachi’s cheek, brushing his thumb against his beloved’s cheekbone. “I wasn’t risking my sanity. I was taking it back. I wanted to feel...right again, not just for you, but for me as well. Without you…I would have sunk back into that darkness and let it destroy me. You saved me...just enough so that I could find the strength to save myself.”

Sasuke lowers his gaze, feeling his words to be woefully inadequate. “This isn’t about payback or about hurting anyone, and it’s not about not trusting you either. You just didn't have the necessary skill I needed to take that step forward, and that’s not your fault. I didn’t want to make you worry about me while you were so busy planning for the wedding. While you were busy planning for our future. The future that couldn’t coexist with my past.” So he’d erased it from his memories.

"You say that, but your actions speak otherwise." Had he actually saved Sasuke, he wouldn't have needed to seek out Shisui's 'assistance.' "I'm a sorry excuse for a husband if you actually thought my choosing what color the napkins were going to be was more important than your mental health."

He needed space before he said something he would truly regret. "I'll be back in a few minutes.” Itachi sighs as he kisses Sasuke. "I love you. Never doubt that. And I will get past this.” Somehow. Sasuke had meant to do this to make him happy. It was supposed to be the thought that counted, after all? It wasn't as if he wanted Sasuke to suffer, but there had only been one time when Itachi felt more useless than he had now and that was when he knew Sasuke wouldn't get off death row. He hadn't had the necessary skills then either. He’d had to rely on others to save his soulmate.

Outside of the bedroom, it was a short walk to the kitchen where the solid cedar liquor cabinet stood about the size of a fridge. Madara had, of course, made sure that it was well-stocked before the boys traipsed off on their honeymoon.

Itachi sighs in relief when he gets there and opens it. Vodka would chase away the blues. At least for a little while. Itachi would deal with the hangover later. "It'll have to do." Itachi downs his first glass of vodka. "Or not." One apparently wasn't going to cut it. It was far from the most responsible option, but drinking himself silly did give him an excuse not to have to process this fully for awhile. He'd rather deal with the hangover from hell than all this.

Maybe after three, four, or five shots he'd be intoxicated enough to go back to Sasuke. In some distant corner of his mind, he knew that Sasuke had only been trying to make him happy. That Sasuke needed to move on from his traumatic past and of course, he didn't want his lover to live with those horrible memories. It was just the way that he and his cousin had gone about doing so that hurt.

"I'm the world's biggest hypocrite." He sighs as he gets a third shot. "I had him do the same thing to Sasuke." Not to the same scale, but still. And it was Sasuke’s mind to do with what he pleased,
wasn’t it? Yes, five drinks it would be then. Three apparently wouldn’t cut it either.

Before he had always been a casual drinker. Tonight was anything, but casual though. He could only pray that somehow the burn in his throat would distract his mind enough to go back to the gorgeous man currently in his bed. Sasuke had MEANT well. He did love Sasuke. That should be enough. It would be enough. He just needed to keep to himself long enough to control his temper. That was all.

An hour after Itachi left the bedroom, a quiet song drifts through the air from the back deck. “Land of the silver birch, home of the beaver, where still the mighty moose…wanders at will… Blue lake and rocky shore, I will return once more…” A soft hum fills the air, floating up and down in a soft, lilting melody.

He must have driven Sasuke to insanity again. He was clearly humming some sort of Canadian folk-song. "Damn it." Itachi sighs as he makes his way back to the bedroom.

But the bedroom was empty, the covers of the bed bunched up and caved in where Sasuke once lay. One of the pillows was missing, along with the thin quilt that once lay folded on the end of the bed.

"Great." His aloofness had made Sasuke bolt. "Once again, I completely failed him." There wasn't enough vodka on the planet for this. "Alright. I need to be calm. He can't have gone too far." He uses his mind reading abilities to track Sasuke down. And he found his soulmate almost immediately.

Sasuke truly hadn’t gone very far. He’d merely moved thirty meters to the back of the cabin where the back deck could look over the ocean.

He sighs in relief at seeing Sasuke was physically fine. "Sasuke?" He approaches him slowly, not wanting to spook the other man.

Dark spiky hair flattens against one of the posts holding up the roof over the deck and the singing fades as Sasuke grows quiet where he sits on the edge with the pillow tucked under him and the quilt wrapped around his bare shoulders. “…Hey Itachi.”

"I'm sorry, Sasuke." He closes the distance between them. "I just needed more time to compose myself than I thought." Even now, his gait was more wobbly than he would have liked, but Itachi figures he can blame that on the alcohol.

“…It’s okay.” Sasuke’s eyes gaze out over the ocean, reflecting the blue in onyx depths. “You took some time for yourself…so I took some time for me.”

"Can we just stop hurting each other?" Itachi takes Sasuke’s hand in his own and kisses him. "We were so happy not even two hours ago."

Blinking slowly, Sasuke closes his eyes and nods, leaning his head against Itachi’s shoulder. “I’d like that.” He had nothing else to hide, nothing left to battle. There was nothing left to do to stave off the demons of his past. “I’d love nothing more than to be happy together for the rest of our lives.”

"Good." Itachi smiles and kisses him. "Because I would like that too."

Sasuke accepts the kiss, melting into it easily. The quilt falls around his hips, baring pale skin for Itachi’s perusal as he wraps his arms around Itachi’s neck.
Itachi sighs softly and wraps his arms tightly around his soulmate. At least with Sasuke, everything would be alright. He'd worry about everything else later. For now, all that existed was the two of them.
Chapter 29

Chapter by celestia193

Chapter Notes

celestia193’s Author's Note: And finally...we come to the last bit of angst and the happy ending. It has been a long, hard road for our boys, but finally they'll be getting the ending they deserve.

It was times like this when Sasuke was glad that 'closed for renovations’ didn’t actually mean completely closed. Even if there was chaos with Kankuro going on in the back of the building, Sasuke was more than happy to help Gaara whittle down his stock of Irish whiskey. Or vodka. Or rum. Or whatever Gaara happened to have on hand.

Of course, even if his mind was starting to get a little fuzzy with the buzz, Sasuke was still more than aware enough to realize that his husband was being extremely cuddly today, even more so than usual. Which was a rather impressive feat, seeing as after the little…incident at the end of their honeymoon, Itachi had sulked and wallowed and given tentative affection for over a week before he actively started seeking Sasuke out for more aggressive cuddling. But even by Itachi standards, this was a bit much.

So he leans back into Itachi’s arms, where they sat together in one of the lounge booths, and presses a kiss to Itachi’s cheek as his dark locks slip to curve around his eyes. “You’re very attached to me today.” He smirks softly and cuddles into the crook of Itachi’s neck. “What gives?” Did he think Sasuke was going to run away or something? Because that wasn’t happening anytime soon, or ever.

"This." Itachi takes Sasuke's hand and kisses along his arm where the magnolia tattoo was. "You're my husband and I love you. Do I need a reason to express that?"

“No, I suppose not.” Sasuke laughs softly. “It’s okay if you want to be extra cuddly today. I like it.” He liked almost anything Itachi did to him. He stretches out his other arm, where the crow tattoo had been expertly covered up through Temari’s exceptional tattooing skills by the image of an angel with black wings. Itachi liked calling Sasuke his fallen angel, so he’d thought it would be poetic to have that adorning his arm instead. Now he was Itachi’s precious love twice over. By destiny and by choice.

Itachi smiles at that, but it wasn’t one of happiness. It was one of guilt. "Good. I'm glad that you feel that way." He knew what would be happening as soon as the 5 o'clock news started. "I'll always be here for you. We've made it through more trials in the relatively short time we've been together than most couples will face in a lifetime and I just want to you to know, that I'm always here for you." He leans in and kisses Sasuke.

Accepting and returning the kiss, he could feel that something was different than usual. “Itachi?” Sasuke didn’t know what it was exactly, but something was wrong. “Are you alright?”

"As much as I can be given the situation." He frowns when the kiss ends. "The news is going to be covering a lot of topics related to everything...BEFORE." Itachi didn't feel as though there was any
further elaboration required at this point. "It doesn't matter anymore, but it might be painful for you to hear it all laid out once again."

“Not as painful as it would have been.” After all, Sasuke no longer remembered most of it. It would be like…viewing the life of a stranger, but knowing that somewhere, somehow, it was actually his life. He’d already seen bits and pieces of it on the internet, so seeing it hashed out again on the news wasn’t much of a shock. “When does it come on?”

"I imagine they'll headline with it." Itachi wasn't entirely sure that he bought Sasuke's casual reaction towards everything. "I'm sorry. I wish there was a way you never had to think of such things again." Even taking away memories didn't stop the world from commenting on it. He would have seen it mentioned online or on TV. Somewhere.

Gaara strides over with a number of fresh drinks and sets them on the table. “The Canadian broadcast of it starts in four minutes.” He knew that look in Sasuke’s eye. And even if Sasuke knew vaguely what happened now, there was no chance that he wasn’t going to want to know what had finally come of his life’s work. Most of what was online was speculative at best, but tonight, the CIA would be releasing their investigation files to the public.

Sasuke’s eyes drift to the television and a single frisson of nerves shoots through him. Did he want to hear it? He supposed he would eventually hear about it all anyway, so maybe it was best to get it over with?

Itachi holds his hand and gives him a reassuring smile. "Just remember, you're safe now and it doesn't matter what they think of you." They being the public in general. "As far as they're concerned, you're dead."

“I know.” Sasuke snuggles a little closer, settling himself deeply into Itachi’s lap. He was strong. He could handle this. He’d handled it once before when he had all of his memories, and he would handle it even better without them. “TV, on.” Thank the heavens that most things could be controlled through voice command. Because he really couldn’t be bothered to get up from Itachi’s lap right now.

"I love you." Itachi's grip tightens on his husband as the news begins. He wasn't entirely sure that he was ready for this, but it was too late to back out now.

As his gaze shifts to the television, Sasuke spies a picture of himself from quite a long time ago, when the CIA had made him ‘presentable’ for the courtroom. Only, it was one of the pictures they hadn’t used, since it made him look younger, more innocent than they would have liked to portray to the world.

“Last year, the world saw the death of one of the most prolific serial killers in history, Sasuke Uchiha.” The anchorman settles his notes on the desk, everything about him perfectly professional. “But since his death last fall, the CIA’s biggest case in years exploded with new information that pointed to a massive wave of crime, corruption, and murder that have some experts questioning just who this young man was. Villain, vigilante, or victim? After the findings surrounding the renowned scientist and medical doctor Orochimar Sannin came to light, new evidence has been provided to cast a light on international trafficking rings led by figures such as Danzo Shimura, another of Uchiha’s less than upstanding victims.”

Pictures flash across the screen, first of Orochimaru and Danzo, then of other faces that Sasuke vaguely recognized from glances at the notes he’d given to Shisui. Then, came the faces of the two old prosecutors. “The corruption reaches as far as the supreme courts as prosecutors Mitokado and Utatane are found to have deep ties to the crime lord Danzo Shimura, and facilitated his navigation
around the rule of law."

“The counselors in question were unable to be reached for comment in the months following the initial findings, and new records coming to light assert that Counselor Mitokado and Counselor Utatane have both passed away under suspicious circumstances. Whether murder, suicide, or by natural causes, the cause of death has not been made public knowledge.”

Sasuke blinks bemusedly, then turns his head to Itachi. “They’re dead?”

"That is what the news report says." Itachi didn't regret it in the slightest. The only thing he regretted was not making them suffer more. "So yes, I would say that's safe to say." First, he had ruined their careers and then, he may have directed some of their former victims towards them and let nature take it's course. Their deaths had been horrific, but not horrific enough in his opinion. He could only hope that they were suffering even worse in the afterlife and Itachi was damn sure their family members were all embarrassed to be related to them.

But the broadcast still wasn’t over just yet. “Three months ago, a cousin of Sasuke Uchiha’s published a biography of the young man whose life turned from one terror to the next. In it, what readers have found is the horrifying and inspiring account of a boy failed by the system, who sought justice for those who also felt betrayed and passed over by the institutions that were supposed to see that justice was done. From punishing murder to assault to gang violence, abuse to sex crimes to the underworld’s drug cartels. There seems to be no unfinished crusade that this young vigilante would not take up for those who couldn’t find justice alone. Whether for good or ill, last year the world lost a force of nature in Sasuke Uchiha. And whether he will be remembered as a villain or a hero is for history to decide.”

The anchorman shuffles through the last of his papers and nods grimly. “The story of Sasuke Uchiha is available for sale internationally, the work titled When Eyes See Only Darkness is a graphic and dark representation of the underbelly of society and the injustice that many victims face and have no power to alter or control. Making the top of the New York Bestsellers List, the work is acclaimed to be visceral and gripping, with a genuine look into the darkness of humanity thought all but lost. For adult readers, it is cautioned and recommended as a biography as inspiring as it is heartbreaking. For more information on the published work and further coverage of the story, see our website.”

Stunned. Sasuke was simply…stunned into silence. There it was. His life was out there. And apparently quite the read, too. He’d read it himself, of course, but to hear it put that way was something he’d never expected. He also never even remotely expected that the word hero would be thrown around in the same news report as him. “Itachi…”

"It's over, Sasuke." Itachi sighs as he kisses his cheek. "I wish that there was some way that we could have found you sooner and that you and all those people wouldn't have had to suffer so horribly."

Thousands of times every single day. Itachi was quite certain that was an accurate estimate at this point how many times such thoughts would consume him, but no matter what he did...he couldn't change the past.

"As much as it's ever going to be over." He knew that one never 'got over' what Sasuke had been through. And even if Sasuke didn't remember a thing, the ghosts of those memories would follow him for the rest of his life. Hell, his exposure had 'only' been secondhand and Itachi knew it was unlikely he'd ever manage to get over everything that happened. "I hope having your true story out in the public brings you some measure of comfort and we can get on with building our lives together." He brushes his lips against Sasuke's.
“Yeah.” Sasuke hoped for that too. But at least he didn’t have to remember any of it anymore. He leans into Itachi’s kiss, rocking gently back and forth in his soulmate’s lap. Itachi’s warmth was always a comfort, and Sasuke desperately wished that he could make everything better for Itachi. But he knew that only time would heal them both. Time and love.

Sasuke stokes the fire in the ancient fireplace, the warmth of the flames warming his skin as raven locks fall across his cheekbone. It was nice to be back in this place, the cabin out west where they could be alone or have the family over for a visit.

He and Itachi spent most of their time in Toronto nowadays, but they came out here to British Columbia sometimes to get away from it all. And it had become their usual retreat away from the world.

This Christmas, though, it wasn’t just their retreat. “Hey Sasuke!” Shisui pokes his head out of the kitchen, arms laden with cheese, crackers, and fruits for days. “Where do you want these?”

“You can put them in the middle of the table. Make sure that the kids can get to them.” The last thing they needed was one of the tables getting upended by a mischievous, rambunctious munchkin. Sasuke didn’t want to clean up another mess like that.

He pulls the grate up and presses the button to drop the glass panel in front of the fire. The heat still came through the tiny holes in it, but no one would accidentally fall in this way. Sasuke strides towards the kitchen and looks around the edge of the door frame. “Hey Mom, is the turkey plate ready? You know that Itachi can only distract them for so long.”

Mikoto Uchiha smiles at Sasuke and shakes her head. "It's ready, but I'm afraid it's missing the drumsticks." She clucks her tongue as she remembers just how that happened. "It seems that your father and Madara have far more in common than they'll ever admit. Sneaky as thieves when they want something."

Sasuke shakes his head snorts with amusement. “I should have known that those two were up to something.” Those two had been sneaking around way too much for it to be innocent. “You kept one of the thighs for me, right?” He glances at her hopefully, dark eyes sparkling happily.

"Sasuke, after everything you've been through, you could take the whole damn turkey and I wouldn't protest." She shakes her head and smiles at him.

Planting a kiss on his mother’s cheek, Sasuke picks up the huge platter filled with a gigantic turkey’s worth of meat. This was no small reunion, and he wondered if maybe the second turkey in the oven might not be enough to feed their whole family. “Is Itachi still outside with the kids?” Last he’d checked, his husband was trying to enjoy the sprinkling of snow while it lasted. It wasn’t often that snow came this far southwest.

"Mhm. They were going to go sledding, but I think they've turned Itachi into the sled." Mikoto smiles at her only child. "He's rather adorable with them and I couldn't ask for better grandchildren."

“Yeah…” And no matter how much trouble those two caused, he wouldn’t give them up for the world. Despite how they sometimes made Sasuke want to rip his perfectly dyed hair out. “Do you mind calling them back in? I’ve got to finish setting the tables.” He’d commandeered the sitting room for this meal, since the dining room couldn’t hope to hold them all. “And I should probably
make sure that the wine and whiskey are out of sight.” The last thing they needed was those two accidentally getting into the grown-up drinks.

Mikoto nods at that request. "Of course." She winks at him. "We all know that Madara and Naori want to see them as much as your father and I do." With that being said, the Uchiha darts off to coral well, more Uchihas.

Sasuke chuckles softly to himself as he brings the heavy platter of food out to the sitting room and settles it on the center table. Around it lay snacks and small desserts, since no one believed that they were going to be able to keep anyone out of the desserts until after dinner. But the heap of garlic butter mashed potatoes with sour cream and cream cheese was to die for, and Sasuke knew that would disappear before the desserts were even touched. The peas, carrots, and broccoli were another story, but his kids would get their greens, he would make sure of that.

A familiar, quiet tread glides into the room from the archway behind him. Ad it was a tread that he knew very well. So well, in fact, that it comes as no surprise when two strong, gentle arms wrap around him and pull him away from the wide coffee table, the fingers of those hands trailing under his shirt and across his skin. What DID make him jump was the realization that those arms were—“COLD!” They were fucking freezing! “ITACHI!”

"Don't worry. I can always warm you up later." He chuckles as he kisses his cheek.

“Your the one making me cold!” Sasuke bats Itachi’s hands away and wriggles out of his husband’s embrace. He shivers lightly and retreats towards the fireplace. “Did you wear gloves at all out there?”

"I wore mittens." Itachi laughs softly at his lover's antics. "You've always been so sensitive to the cold though. I'll warm up soon enough. I'm inside now."

Sasuke pouts softly, but sits next to the fire and glances back at Itachi. He shuffles over to make a space for his soulmate there. “…Come on. It’ll be faster if you warm up by the fire."

He smiles and sits by him. "Yes, it will be much faster." He pulls Sasuke into his lap. "Even more so with my own sexy electric blanket here."

Resisting the urge to shiver again, Sasuke takes Itachi’s hands in his and holds them close to the warm glass panel. “So, Mom took over wrangling those two, I take it? She said something about them turning you into their sled.”

"Yes, they do seem to love doing that." Itachi smiles at his husband. "You know I can't say no to their Bubble Eyes. They inherited them from you. But your mother is exceptional at handling them."

Sasuke grumbles softly as he leans back against Itachi’s chest. “I do not have ‘Bubble Eyes’.” That implied something cute. Ad Sasuke was most certainly NOT cute. He had bedroom eyes, that’s how he got whatever he wanted from Itachi these days. NOT Bubble Eyes.

"Yes, you do seem to love doing that." Itachi smiles at his husband. "You know I can't say no to their Bubble Eyes. They inherited them from you. But your mother is exceptional at handling them."

Sasuke grumbles softly as he leans back against Itachi’s chest. “I do not have ‘Bubble Eyes’.” That implied something cute. Ad Sasuke was most certainly NOT cute. He had bedroom eyes, that’s how he got whatever he wanted from Itachi these days. NOT Bubble Eyes.

"Yes, you do and they're irresistible." He smirks and kisses the other man as if to prove his point.

He huffs into the kiss indignantly, but doesn’t protest as he welcomes Itachi’s tongue into his mouth. Yes…he did so love the things Itachi could do with his tongue…

“EEEEWWW! Papa’s kissing Daddy!” And…the sound of their five year old son jolted Sasuke back to his senses in an instant.
Itachi breaks the kiss and smiles at their son. "Well yes, I do try to make a habit of doing so. You'll understand why one day when you're older." Much, much older if Itachi had anything to say about it.

“Don’t worry, Hiro, you don’t have to look.” Kieran, the elder of the boys by three years walks in, his spiky black hair a mess of damp, half ruffled locks. He claps a hand over his little brother’s eyes, then one over his own. “I got you covered, Dad.”

Sasuke chuckles and turns in Itachi’s lap, wrapping his arms around his lover’s neck. “Good boy.” He presses a kiss to Itachi’s lips, not minding the sight of his mother watching and giggling, and trying very poorly to hide it.

"That's a good boy. On both counts." Itachi smirks as he returns the kiss happily, reveling in the domestic bliss.

“Does that mean I get to open my presents early?” Kieran perks up at the idea of being able to bargain with his Papa. His Papa was always easier to make deals with. Though their Dad spoiled them plenty too.

"I don't see why not." He smiles at Sasuke. " You don't mind, do you? What's it matter if he opens them a couple hours early?"

Sasuke rolls his eyes, the glances over Itachi’s shoulder at where their eldest son was peaking through his fingers, grinning widely as he hoped for a yes. “…Fine. But that means that you have to play with your brother and keep him entertained. Alright?”

The hand falls from his eyes and Kieran grins widely. “Okay Dad!” Then he grabs his little brother and pulls the tiny boy towards the table. “Come on, there’s food!” and he knew what that meant. It was time to steal some of the dark meat before it all disappeared.

"They're too adorable." Itachi kisses his cheek and smiles. "You know that you can't say no to them anymore than I can."

“I admit to no such thing.” Sasuke blinks twice, his nose twitching, then covers his mouth and nose with his sleeve, only to sneeze loudly. The sound that comes from his mouth resembles a mouse more than the dog he felt like as his hair shakes back and forth with the force of it. “Ugh…alright, who let Hinata sprinkle fairy dust everywhere?” Again…

"Madara was curious about it." Gaara flashes Sasuke a somewhat apologetic grin. "That and well, Hinata does love to show off her unique abilities. Seeing as it's Christmas, I didn't see a reason to protest."

Hinata pops up behind the vampire’s shoulder, her wings fluttering as she presses a kiss to her love’s cheek. “And I’m sure that Itachi finds you adorable when you sneeze.”

Sasuke’s cheeks blaze a vibrant scarlet. “I am NOT cute.”

Itachi chuckles as he pulls Sasuke into his arms and kisses his beloved's cheek. "Of course, you're the sexiest sneezer on the planet." Everything that Sasuke did could be construed as adorable now that he had outgrown his martyr streak.

“Shut up…” Sasuke sinks deeper into Itachi’s embrace, hiding his face from the laughter he could see brewing on the faces of the two immortals. He loved Itachi, he really did, but did everything Itachi do have to be embarrassing?
"Well, I suppose I could other things with my mouth besides speaking, but not in front of the children." He smirks. "Honestly, Sasuke."

Now that, Sasuke could latch onto. "That sounds like an interesting promise…" He smirks and presses a kiss to Itachi’s neck. "We could have Shisui and Sakura watch them. I’m sure their cousins would enjoy a sleepover."

"I like the way you think." He sighs in pleasure at the attention.

"Boys, save the fun for later!" Naori strides across the room and straightens out some of the pillows on the closest couch for two little girls and a little boy, all with matching dark hair and eyes, save for the boy’s jade green irises. "There’s children who want their presents first."

Itachi nods at that as he smiles at their children. "Go on and open them." He knew that the living room would be a mess in short order, but eh who cared? These were priceless memories.

"Yay!" Hiro bounds towards the tree and nearly dives headfirst into the pile of presents underneath the tree. Predictably, all but the two eldest boys end up diving into the mountain.

Shisui chuckles as his little girls go at it with their cousin. "They’re certainly eager." And he’d known as soon as Itachi and Sasuke agreed to let their boys open presents early, there was no way he was getting away with saying no. Besides, what would that make him, when he always begged to be allowed to open them early as a kid.

"Whatever you do, don't shake the one with the red bow on it." Fugaku chuckles as his youngest grandson darts over to his present.

Madara shakes his head. He knew exactly what the other man had done. It was a classical choice, but Madara considered himself a modern man. "The one with the purple bow, you can shake as much as you desire though." He knew damn well why Fugaku didn't want the one with the red ribbon it shaken and why there was so much wrapping paper on a pet carrier with airholes in it. Large ones. Fortunately, their youngest grandson was only five. So he didn't understand.

Hiro gleefully picks up the one with the purple ribbon and shakes it, hearing only a soft thumping inside before he starts tearing at the wrapping paper.

Kieran swallows a spoonful of mashed potatoes, having chosen to start eating with his cousin Eito first, rather than get into the middle of his brother and cousins’ crawling. But the box with the red bow was making noises, and it intrigued him. "Hey." He elbows his cousin. "What do you think is in it?"

"It's probably a puppy or a kitten." Eito shakes his head. "That's why it has airholes." To him, it was obvious.

A puppy? Kieran’s eyes widen as he scrambles towards the present addressed to him and his little brother, where he could hear faint whimpering coming from inside. "Grandpa!" He rips at the wrapping paper and unveils the pet carrier. The latch didn’t look too hard. No harder than the lock on the snack cupboard at home. So he fiddles with it and pops it open, pulling out a beautiful little golden puppy, only for a little black puppy to come right along with it. Two puppies! "Hiro! Hiro! Look!"

Hiro giggles as he glomps them. "Puppies! This one be Sunny and that can be Shadow." The names make perfect sense to him. One looked sunny, and one looked like a shadow.

Sasuke laughs as he watches the puppies crawl all over their sons. It was a damn good thing that
they’d gotten a bigger house recently. The tiny apartment that he and Itachi had moved into a
decade ago definitely wouldn’t have been able to handle two kids and a couple of puppies. “At
least Father ran it past us first so we could puppy-proof the house.”

"Yes, that was kind of him." Itachi shakes his head in amusement. "Though they still haven't
opened Madara's present yet."

“It’s half open.” Sasuke glances at the mess Hiro had made of the other gift. “Hiro. Go finish
opening your lion grandpa’s present, okay?”

Hiro laughs and nods as he opens it. "Video games and a new system!" A very expensive looking
one at that.

“Bribery with puppies and video games.” Sasuke smiles as one of the puppies manages to crawl
over onto his lap for a snuggle. “I think our fathers are trying to compete.”

"Probably, but it's adorable." Mikoto laughs as she kisses her husband's cheek.

"Just as long as they don't becomeUTTERLY childish and start comparing sizes." Naori snorts in
amusement as she also bestows a kiss on her husband's cheek.

“At least they can’t compare fangs.” Shikamaru yawns from the couch, where his head is pillowed
in Temari’s lap. “That gets bloody.”

“That, from the vampire that Madara called a koala bear with fangs.” Sasuke rolls his eyes, glad to
not be part of that particular pissing match.

"Well, it is an accurate description." Itachi shrugs. "One has to give credit where it is due."

Shikamaru rolls his eyes at the description, but merely rolls over in Temari’s lap and goes back to
sleep.

Sasuke pops a peppermint into his mouth, rolling it about on his tongue to rid himself of the smell
of garlic from the mashed potatoes. His mother’s cooking was delicious, but it didn’t always make
for the best kissing breath. "I like having our family together for the holidays. It had become
something of a tradition, but only this year had they managed to get everyone together and
available at once.

Itachi playfully pokes Sasuke's forehead. "I agree. Besides, they can hardly say no to a request
from such a beautiful fallen angel as you." He smirks at his own play on words.

A matching smirk curls Sasuke’s lips, and he leans back to press a kiss to Itachi’s lips as the puppy
in his lap takes off in search of another warm human to cuddle. He was so very happy. Happier
than he’d ever thought he would be. “So have you forgiven me now? For everything I’ve done…?”

"Well, I wish you hadn't been such a martyr, but I suppose it doesn't matter anymore.” He smiles
and kisses Sasuke back. "We found our happy ending, even if our love story was
rather..unconventional."

Sasuke supposed that was as close to forgiveness as he was likely to get. And he would take it. He
would take whatever Itachi gave him without a second thought. He raises a hand to Itachi’s hair
and strokes it gently, pressing their lips firmly together. “I love you.”

"I love you too." Itachi smiles as he kisses him deeply. "More than anything, even my sanity at
times."
“Sanity’s over-rated. You’ve been driving me crazy since that first night in the bar.” A night that Sasuke would never forget for as long as he lived. Itachi was the one thing that he would never, ever forget.

"Good because I was about to say the same to you." Itachi smiles at him.

Sasuke presses his advantage and pushes Itachi over onto the floor, straddling his hips and pressing a fiery kiss to his lips. “A fallen angel I might be, but I’m your magnolia.” Now and forever. Their tongues dance, and nothing in the world could ruin this feeling.

“EEEEWWWW! Daddy’s kissing Papa again!”

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