Love Beneath the Waves

by ahans1b

Summary

The world isn’t kind to the modern day merman. Naruto coasts through life as his kind slowly become extinction. When a human ventures into his turf, he wasn’t sure what to make of the strange creature. Taking a huge risk, the merman develops strong feelings for the man. But he never would’ve expected how much it would forever change his life by doing so.

Forced into a new world with both kind and cruel humans, will he make it out okay? Or was it all a mistake?

Contains explicit sexual content and some graphic violence in later chapters.

Notes

New story I’m working on. Super excited for this fic! Still going to be working on my other fic, Stepbrothers. The chapters will be short so the updates won’t be too hard on me. This is my version of writing fluff, but because I think so dark and there will be a considerable amount of angst in it. So it will be a fluffy angst fic if that makes any sense. This is a creative outlet for me and I really just wanted to make a fantasy world with a non-human Naruto in it.

Heavily influenced by my love of animals, the ocean, and wildlife photography. Keep in mind I’m not a marine biologist nor an expert of mermaid folklore, so if you know something
I don’t please let me know in the comments. If you want to get a good feel for the fic watch, The Shape of Water. I highly recommend it. Great movie!

The first chapter is mostly prologue.

Bata’d by heartsns.

Disclaimer: I obviously do not own any of the characters in it. Naruto is a merman in this story for fuck’s sake.
Rays of warm light glowed softly, piercing the ocean’s glassy surface and fading into deep blue depths as the sun above reached its highest peak. Bubbles floated up and around Naruto’s body glimmering like little pearls, surrounding the merman with their delicate beauty as he reached up towards the heavens, propelling his strong tail through the current. Climbing out of the cold and barren shelf and into the shallows were reefs teemed with all sorts of life. From aggressive eels, to playful dolphins, goofy clownfish, intelligent octopus, vibrant corals and sea enemies, to stunningly beautiful—but deadly—lion fish, and so many more wonderful species of fish and coral that Naruto couldn’t name them all. The list was endless.

For most his life he’s been coming up to the shallows, and every time he’s spotted something new. It was all truly amazing and exciting.

Curious by nature, the young absolutely loved discovering new things—especially human things. Which made him very different among his kind. He stood out…and in a bad way with his undesirable hobbies and unique appearance.

Unlike the other mermaids or mermen, Naruto’s skin tone was much darker in color and slightly thicker from the sun tanning it. Most merfolk were pale, sickeningly so. Borderline transparent. He was the only one who’d ever dare going near the surface—unless it was absolutely necessary for gathering food. And it showed.

Because of that, the few remaining mer’s that Naruto knew of treated him as an outcast. They certainly didn’t share his interest with the human artifacts. In fact, they feared it like it was a curse object or something as equally absurd.

Funny that they didn’t feel that way about the sunken vessels they all used as homes to hide away in at night.

Now add his cropped hair and dark complexion to the mix and he was a living mermaid repellant. A disgrace to his kind. Mers took their appearance very seriously and he was a fashion catastrophe in their opinion. A pariah.

So he wasn’t the most beautiful or handsome merman in his clan, but at least he wasn’t spending his life cowering away in dark little hidey-hole.

It was ridiculous that so much status was placed on looks alone. He understood to some extent—the part where they took great pride in their long, flowing hair and glamorous fins. That was nice and all, but the length of one’s hair should not be the main priority for a species on the brink of extinction.

And besides, it was impractical to have hair reaching all the way down to his pictorial fins. It just got tangled up in the reefs, caves and kelp forests whenever he went out exploring. More than once Naruto was subjected to endure considerable pain after ripping off strands of golden hair from his scalp whenever it got snared on something. If he was being chased by a shark when that happened… well, he would’ve been lunch.

He’d rather not go there…

As it was, Naruto pretty much had the entire section of the shallows and reef to himself. He preferred
it that way, too...most of the time. But sometimes it did get lonely. Months have passed since he’s ran into another of his kind. Not that there were many left.

Suffocating large algae blooms, mass bleaching of corrals from rising sea temperatures, toxins in food, and the lack of fish around from the huge ships that pass by, greedily snatching them all up with their mile long nets, have all devastated the mer population in recent years. And with the ever decreasing population of sea life all around, they weren’t the only ones suffering. It was the end of their era.

Naruto was the last of his species to be born in over three decades. For all he knew there have been no other merbabies conceived since. It was a sore subject among the merfolk and the reason there was now strict laws and regulations in regards to breeding rights. Only the strongest and most influential were allowed to pair in hopes of producing a healthy heir.

Basically that meant Naruto had no chance of ever gaining a mate under his deplorable status.

In fact, the merfolk made it atrociously clear that Naruto was on the bottom of that ‘desirable mate’ list when they forbade him from learning the basics of reproduction. Even by his own parents. All he knew was that he was a healthy sexually mature adult male. That’s it. Pretty fucked up that he didn’t even know how he was made or what babies looked like or what mating entailed, and it was very unlikely that he ever would.

The only plus side in the matter was how being the last to be born influenced his character. There was no real hope or future to look forward to so Naruto liked to live life to the fullest. Without fear of what might be out there to get him, knowing the world was brighter on the surface than wasting away without any real purpose in the dark, murk depths.

So for that, he was grateful to be the last one. To not know what life was like prior to their apocalyptic world. To not be so hell bent on survival that he’d never get to experience what living life freely was like in the first place. However, it also took a toll on him—

There was a constant ache in his chest knowing he was one of the last living merman, yet there was nothing he could do about it. They were nothing more than a dying species desperately trying to fight off the brink of extinction like so many other species have tried to and failed. He would never know what it would be like to have a lover, have a child, or carry a baby in his arms—all things his body craved for on a primal level.

But more than anything Naruto just wanted to raise a child.

He wasn’t picky, any child would do really. It didn’t have to be his. He would love it all the same. Naruto just wanted someone in his life to share his experiences with, preferably one who’d appreciate him and maybe even look up to him as a role model someday. To have the little long-tailed bugger by his side and watch his or her face light up when he shared all his secret treasures, fishing grounds and hideaways. To school on what was safe to eat or not, what types of fish were friendly and what ones meant trouble, and so, so much more.

Those were only a few things he wish he could pass down on a future generation. Happy things in Naruto’s life that he wished his parents would’ve taught him. But all that would never happen…

Some dreams were never meant to come true.

Instead, the merman continued on doing what he loved most. Exploring. But even he wasn’t naive enough to not to know there were many risks associated with it.
Danger. And a lot of it.

It was a steep price. One he was willing to pay.

Hungry sharks often prowled the shelf and shallows for an easy meal. Mermen were definitely included on that dinner menu. And that was only one threat lurking underneath the waves. Countless others still existed. Perhaps the biggest one of them all was above the surface. The place were Naruto liked spending most of his time soaking up the sun’s warm summer rays. The place that held the biggest threat to all merfolk. Humans.

Throughout history there has always been bad blood between humans and merfolk.

Although this area was generally considered safe from the destructive and invasive species, there was still an occasional boat carrying the human as they passed by. Always in the far distance, but still too close for comfort. They rarely approached anywhere near the island.

And for good reason.

The volcanic island where Naruto called home was completely surrounded by sharp corals that could easily strip the steel off of any ship like a tin can if the vessel so much as dared to get near. While the smaller boats could approach much closer, they would still need to make it through the clawing waves and strong undertow to reach the safe zone.

In all his years, the merman has never once witnessed a ship make it to shore before. But he has heard stories from others like himself. Plus there was plenty of evidence from the shipwrecked skeletons lining the ocean bottom like a mass graveyard. Added together at least some of the rumors had to be true: At some point in time, humans have tried on multiple occasions to take over the island, or at least get on it.

Naruto’s personal favorite story was the one that placed his parents as the hero’s.

Long before Naruto was born, a large vessels carrying dozens of humans captured a young mermaid in a net. Minato (Naruto’s father) was able to save the baby girl by tearing the net open with his teeth. Although successful in the rescue attempt, his father was witnessed by a few of the men on board the ship. Months later the fishermen had returned to trap and capture all the merfolk. They had brought reinforcements.

It ended in a massacre, or so Naruto was told.

As the Mer’s prepared to defend themselves, Kushina (Naruto’s mother) sat in the frontlines, singing one of the most beautiful songs on rock, entrancing the fishermen. Luring the men into a jagged stretch of reef where they awaited a watery grave. While the ship slowly sunk, the leaders of Naruto’s clan surrounded the defenseless humans and ripped them all to shreds. Pulling at their limbs until the sea was painted red with their blood. Until there were no witnesses left to tell the tragic ending.

It was not the first or last time something like that had happened. For centuries merfolk and humans have been in conflict with each other. And for centuries the grizzly outcome remained the same, or close to it.

Yet his kind still used the steel skeletons of human ships as sturdy homes.

Kinda macabre now that he thought about it.

Each party was painted as the cut-throat villain depending on which side was telling it. Facts blurred
with superstition dampened the truths. Fearful of the bias fables, mermaids retreated into the depths, out of reach from the scary baby-snatching humans, and humans avoided the ‘cursed’ island altogether.

But Naruto was different.

He believed that merfolk were meant to live in harmony with the humans, bask on rocks, play in the surf, sing for the love of it, and socialize in large colonies.

They have the rare ability to breathe underwater and on land, after all. And ability to speak in many languages if taught to do so.

At the very least, merfolk should be venturing the islands waterways, then explore the nearby lands and underwater caverns when there was nothing else left to discover—which Naruto found highly improbable.

There was always something new to find.

But that’s not what they did, or at least not any mermaid Naruto knew of did. They remained cowering deep below the surface instead. Ever fearful of being discovered by the predators or mankind.

Naruto swam upwards towards the surface, passing by shoals of fish gathered together to ride the easy current and conserve energy. He greeted them with a few chirpy clicks and a flick of his tale. They scattered away fearfully and he laughed. The young merman wasn’t looking for food. Before he even thought about digesting a meal, he needed warm up in the shallows first.

After a long night’s sleep in frigid temperatures, the soft, sun-baked sand gave his cold and shivering body a boost of energy and comfort that he didn’t know he was missing until the first time he dared venture near the surface. As much as the merman craved the sun’s blessed warmth more than breakfast, he always had to be extra careful and ever vigilant when approaching the reef. Constantly scouting for danger.

The visibility stretched much further here, making Naruto a big neon target the second the sunlight reflected off his scales. In the great depths, there was always darkness there to shroud him and he could easily escape hungry predators by retreating into his rusty metal home. He was more far more agile and slim than the larger sharks. They couldn’t fit through the small openings that led to his nest. But out in the open…he was easy pickings.

The scales on his body were delicate and fragile, hardly considered protection from a sharks razor sharp teeth and powerful jaws. Tiny claws on his webbed hands were better suited for prying open oysters and snaring fish than attacking with. A merman was no match for a barrel width bull shark. The apex predator would win every time.

As a safety precaution, every single time Naruto rose up from the great abyss he’d make sure to keep an eye out for his two best friends, Gamakichi and Gamatatsu. The two young bottlenose dolphin brothers. It was a sure sign that no sharks were in the area if they were around. And if one did manage to escape their exceptional radar, dolphins also made a badass body guard. Nothing was going to fuck with them as long as they worked together as a team—which they always did.

Looking around, Naruto spotted a twin set of fins in the far distance. He powered up his thrusts and propelled forward at maximum speed. The sooner he got away from the cold and barren seabed the better.
Like clockwork, the dolphins became excited as soon as they spotted him.

Gamakichi defied physics, as per usual, by zipping through the water like a torpedo and launching out of the sea, leaving a jetstream of bubbles in his wake. Like it was nothing to exert that much energy or fly that high into the open air.

Naruto grinned.

*Showoff.*

Gamakichi was easily the best jumper out of the group of the mismatched friends. Only he could successfully land a backflip ten feet into the air and make it appear effortless.

It was anything but.

Naruto always had a good time with the athletic bundles of energy he called friends. They challenged him and pushed his body to the limits.

A stream of bubbles fizzled behind Naruto’s red tail fins with each vigorous swipe of his tail as he darted through the water like a swordfish, reaching speeds that would’ve made any other merman envious. If the dolphin was going to show his mad acrobatic skills in the blonde’s face, then he was going to have to deal with a little friendly competition.

The other dolphin, Gamatatsu, joined Naruto half way up, racing him to the top without a care in the world. When they finally broke through the surface of a choppy wave together, Naruto couldn’t hold back his excitement any longer and squeaked with joy.

His streamlined body spun gracefully midair, water raining down his tail sparkled like tiny diamonds while he leaped as high as he could go. Sunlight danced off the long length of his elegant tail, bringing forth a golden gleam on the shimmery yellow scales. Never was he more beautiful than when the sun embraced him. The vivid yellows, oranges and reds of his scales burned bright and rich like the setting sun. In the dull blues of the ocean his colors were muted. But in the sun…his tail was a fiery gold with crimson tips.

Diving beneath the waves again, the merman couldn’t help but wonder what the dolphin brothers wanted to do today. Sometimes they searched for pretty shells together. Other times they disturbed sleeping fish, gathered human garbage floating on the surface, body surfed huge waves depending on the weather—or his personal favorite—play a game of catch with an old sand dollar skeleton.

Even though he was able to do these all things with them and produce similarly high frequency sounds that dolphins used to communicate with, Naruto was still unable to speak their language, per say…at least not yet. Over time, he’s developed a special language with Gamakichi and Gamatatsu. One that was unique and only understood only between each other.

Playing might’ve been a lot of fun with the dolphins, but it didn’t take very long for Naruto to learn that he needed to establish a boundary between himself and the dolphins quickly. They were much stronger and larger than he was. Even though his tail exceeded theirs in length, the merman’s lean frame was not nearly as bulky. It hurt like heck when one of them would accidently ram him too hard, typically whenever they played a game of tag. Then there was the fact that they were *bachelor* dolphins. Meaning they were *always* horny.

On more than one occasion they’d gotten a little too frisky and tried mating him. And that was when Naruto decided to set some ground rules and develop the language.

Luckily for him, they were a very intelligent species that picked up social cues after very little
training.

A series of clicks, high and low, grunts or tail slaps were used to break the language barrier. Keeping it basic, three clicks was a yes, three high and one low click was a no. Four slow, low pitched squeals meant back off and that they were being too rough.

He was never able to communicate anything more complex with them, but Naruto loved them anyways…and he like to believe they felt the same way about him. They always did keep coming back day after day for him, after all.

Time flew by as Naruto played with the brothers. But since they had short attention spans, he’d have to switch up the games quite often—not that the blond minded.

They spent a considerable amount of time body surfing every moderate sized wave that developed nearby. Played a few rounds of catch the sand dollar, and then a round of tag. Before the dolphin left to hunt for their lunch, they assisted Naruto with his afternoon clean up/scavenging routine. Picking up any waste, debris, or hazardous materials that they could find floating in the water or collecting along the beach shoreline. It was a tedious task but even the dolphins understood how important it was to keep the area clean.

And it was always a nice surprise when he’d find something interesting or pretty to add to his collection.

Although dangerous and unpredictable, humans still intrigued Naruto.

He loved collecting their little trinkets he found when savaging the wrecks and shoreline. Anything shiny was his absolute favorite. If it shimmered like a shoal of mackerel it was a definite must have in his opinion. He’d like to think of himself as a man of good taste.

So it was a pity that no one else had shared his taste in collecting the beautiful artifacts.

However, Naruto did not find all that human trash he found nice. Not at all. There was a whole lot more harmful stuff coming in from the currents than the good stuff. Causing a major blow to the ecosystem. In that instance, Naruto could understood why the other merfolk didn’t share his taste in manmade objects.

Hard, inedible objects often washed ashore, polluting the water and pristine beaches. Flying animals from above the surface that preyed on small fish would often mistake the inedible objects as food or even become ensnared with the stuff, suffering a slow and agonizing death. Same goes for every sentient creature living underwater. Actually, aquatic animals seemed to be even more susceptible to the hidden danger.

It was horrifying when found one of his little friends fall victim to it. There were a few times Naruto was able to save the animal, freeing the innocent creature from the cruel confines of the wasteful material. But if the animal ate the stuff…it was already too late. There was nothing he could do to save them from that fate.

So, every day he collected harmful objects that he came across, patrolling the shoreline and waves for anything suspicious the tides brought in. Whenever he found something he would place all the trash on a designated pile near a flat rocky ledge, safely out of reach from susceptible animals. The original pile has grown quite large over the years so he’s had to make a few more. He was proud of his hard work and dedication to the project, which was reward enough.

With every piece of trash he collected he felt a strong sense of accomplishment and pride for doing
something good.

By the time they had finished the ‘clean up’ rotation of the island, Naruto and the dolphin brothers were famished. The dolphins split up, using their sonar abilities to seek out and stun hiding fish buried in the sandy bottom. Yet they stayed close enough to Naruto so that he could snack on kelp in relative safety.

But Naruto wasn’t in the mood for fish today.

Rather, he was hoping to find something sweeter. Something that came from the island, not the sea. A rare and delicious succulent treat.

After taking a few bites of the unsatisfying salty plant, the blond took off to the caves in search for a better meal.

A labyrinth of underground tunnels snaked beneath the island, connecting land to sea in the most unlikely of sections. Lava formed underground tunnels ages ago, and now the merman used them like a secret passageway to reach places he wouldn’t have been able to otherwise.

Bioluminescence from his tail light flickered on, illuminating the pitch black caverns in a soft glow, only enough to avoid running into the walls. He used sonar to navigate through the forks in the path. Being so familiar with the tunnel system, Naruto didn’t need to use it much. Instead mostly relying on instinct alone.

It look many attempts to confidently know where he was going when he first started exploring the cave system. There were many failed attempts. Most of the tunnels led to dead ends, and some led to pools too small for him to swim in. Over time, he learned all the tall-tale signs that singled he was getting close to his secret cove. Like the more inland he swam, the lower the salinity in the water was.

Unlike other salt water creatures, Naruto was still able to breathe just fine with the change. Although, it did makes his gills feel itchy after a while. Or he would’ve taken up residence in his favorite spot a long time ago, it was free from predators.

After a few more minutes of navigating through the dark and desolate tunnels, a sphere of light could be seen coming from the other side. He was getting close.

Naruto paddled faster, eager to reach the destination.

Pushing through the final stretch of caverns, the claustrophobic underwater channel opened up like a blooming flower, spilling into a vast fresh water pool. Massive ferns and tropical plants blanketed the surrounding rocky bank, reflecting off the crystalline water like a life sized oil painting. Rich and vibrant colors bled together like emeralds lying in a bed of aquamarine. Branches thicker than Naruto’s waist twisted and reached for the other side as if trying to shake hands with the trees on the other side. Their vibrant green leaves spotted with beads of dew sparkled in the light. Trees were filled with small birds and insects that sang their songs of love and life. Their sounds foreign to the ones Naruto heard underwater. So crisp and unique. It was breathtaking.

It was always breathtaking.

Flora of every shape and size carpeted the ground, teeming with both life and an abundant supply of food. So much so, that Naruto suspected this must be the lands version of a coral reefs. That or he would be extremely envious if all the land in world was this prosperous—when the ocean was so vast and stark and dark in comparison.
It wouldn’t be fair.

Even the water seemed to behave differently here. It fell from the sky in a towering wall, cascading off the edge of a cliff. The vertical stream appeared endless, never once slowing down or shrinking as it filled up the pool below, baffling the young merman. It roared like a savage beast with power and fierceness that he’s never witnessed before, blanketing the valley in mist below and providing nourishment to the trees. Naruto enjoyed the challenge of battling against its current, the workout kept his body in top shape. It also might’ve been a little fun…

But Naruto wasn’t here for a workout.

He immediately headed over to the pebbly beach in hopes to find a sweet treat, his sapphire eyes scanning the bank for anything that looked edible.

The green and red mounds with a bright yellowy inside were his personal favorite. They occasionally fell from the trees and whenever he found one he’d waste no time in snatching it up. Their hard center core was difficult to chew through, but the fruit was delicious and unlike anything he’s ever tasted from the sea. Naruto called them sunkisses, because they were bright and sweet and tangy and made his taste buds zing.

There was none on the ground today so the blond had to settle with the small, brown hairy fruit that made his lips pucker. It was also good.

Naruto sighed softly, munching on his lunch as he lounged on a smooth bolder away from the waterfalls spray. Lazily watching the birds fly by. Secretly wishing he could sprout wing one day and take flight with them.

Birds always seemed to have the most fun.

More importantly, the feathered critters never seemed to be alone…

Days, weeks, months, years passed by with little change in the young merman’s daily routine. Until one day, a strange new creature suddenly appeared on the island, changing Naruto’s fate forever.
Morning has arrived, signaling the start of a fresh new day for the little merman, who wasted no time leaving his nest to start his day off bright and cheery. But as he climbed the steep sloping shelf like he did every single day, he sensed something was off. It was too quiet.

Slowing his pace, Naruto approached the reefs with heightened awareness. Gamakichi and Gamatatsu were in the distance so that meant no sharks were nearby, but still, something was wrong. He could feel it. Lack of fish nearby was proof enough that he was right.

Something had to be scaring them off.

But what?

Heart thudded against his chest at a quickening tempo, Naruto anxiously approached a large jagged rock with as much stealth as he could muster, his large tail fins barely swaying in the current. No bubbles were made when he swam this time, no sound at all as he kept to the shadows. Whatever threat was in the area it wasn’t going to notice him before he found it first.

Erring on the side of caution, the blond tucked his tail into a dark crevice of a large bolder. Careful not to shine any of his bright scales in the radiant sunlight as he scanned the area, knowing that they would be a dead giveaway to his location.

As far as he could see, there was nothing in the distance that stood out. Still, something had to be out there, Naruto was certain of it.

So Naruto waited.

And waited some more…

Time ticked on, a growing sense of unease knotted up his stomach the longer it went on without spotting anything alarming. Paranoia was quickly becoming a real possibility, then suddenly Naruto’s tiny—barely visible—electrical sensors (located around his nose) picked up a large disturbance traveling through the water. Whatever it was wasn’t moving fast, but it was moving. Approximately 15 tail lengths, to be exact, and coming from just behind the nearest reef wall.

Now that Naruto was focused on that point, he could actually hear the creature moving around in the water, and not just his rapid beating heart. Actually, the creature was quite… loud.

Like really loud.

No deadly predator would be making that much ruckus when hunting, or it wouldn’t be eating for
quite a while. No wonder all the fish were hiding. The thing was a menace. Naruto was actually embarrassed that he didn’t hear it earlier.

With the immediate threat lessened, curiosity overtook fear and Naruto unraveled himself from the shelter of the rock to solve the mystery. Advancing towards the reef, the young merman made sure to swim low near the sandy bottom as to not give himself away so easily. The closer he got to the target the louder it became. A plethora of bubbles rose up to the top, deriving from the suspected area containing the boisterous animal. Far more bubbles than Naruto’s ever seen outside of whales.

*What the heck?*

Whales don’t go anywhere near reefs or shallows. Their large bodies needed huge amounts of open space to move freely in. Maybe it got stranded? Hurt or possibly lost? That happened on rare occasions and Naruto was always able to help get them back into deeper waters.

An urgent feeling of obligation to help the poor creature out washed away the sour aftertaste of fear in Naruto’s mouth like the retreating tide. Naruto picked up the pace, yet remained careful to stay under the radar in case he was wrong. Never could he be too careful when swimming in an ocean teeming with predators.

Edging over the reef wall, the blond merman didn’t see anything unusual that captured his gaze, at first. Upon closer inspection, the trail of the bubbles led to a pair of black fins peeking above a large colony of pillar and staghorn corals. Seconds later, the rest of the black, rubbery body bobbed up in Naruto’s line of vision, revealing the mysterious creature.

Long and streamlined, with two large and separated flippers that reminded Naruto of a sea lion he’d met once before. However, there were a few major differences that didn’t make any sense to him. Like the animals face.

It was not round and snouted like that of any seal or sea lion he’s seen before. Instead, its face was flat and hard looking. Covered in the same material-like substance Naruto often found when rummaging through human artifacts and trash. The creature also was blowing out an insane amount of bubbles at non-stop rate, like it was having difficulties breathing. That’s what concerned Naruto the most.

*Maybe the poor sea lion got something stuck on his face and couldn’t get it off?*

Animals getting entangled in garbage was a pretty common event around here.

But sea lions weren’t.

In all his time spending prowling the coast, the merman’s only ever encountered one before. And it wasn’t a pleasant experience.

Fast, intelligent, and agile, sea lions were a potentially vicious predators and difficult to deal with. They could easily cause mass chaos to a fragile ecosystem like a coral reef without much effort on their part. Both sea lion and seal species were considered competition to a merman. There was no way Naruto was about to let some bully land-water beast take over his turf without a fight.

Although, the longer the blue-eyed merman watched the poor beast struggle in the water, the more unrealistic the threat of competition between him and the sea lion became.

Simply put, the handicapped fur seal posed no serious danger for a healthy adult merman in its debilitated form.
Naruto couldn’t help but take pity on it as he observed the creature moving around in the water like a clumsy manatee. It moved way to slow to actually catch anything faster than a crab scuttling on the sandy bottom. And if the crippling face mask wasn’t bad enough, there was another large object attached to its front flippers, like the sea lion was holding on to something or more trash was stuck to it. The sad animal was just hoveringly around a family of angel fish—likely starving but unable to hunt properly. It would eventually starve to death if that’s the fastest it could go.

Naruto wanted to help the defenseless creature out but instinct was telling him to wait a little longer. The sea lion traveled all this way to get here, after all. So it couldn’t be completely helpless. But the merman was pretty impressed that it made it this long. Traveling such a far distance from its home to the island must’ve been a daunting task. That’s quite an epic voyage for a handicapped sea lion to make it out in one piece.

Then again, maybe that’s why it was here. Maybe it was so dumb it got lost and drifted away from its pack, seeking shelter at the nearest island it could find. Maybe it survived on sheer luck alone. Whatever the case, there was too many unanswered questions, too many unknown variables for Naruto to risk his safely on a misjudgment. He decided to stay out of harm’s way and watch how it played out. Anyways, it seemed to be doing well enough for now. Only if it appeared to need immediate intervention would he provide assistance. He wasn’t a heartless monster that would ignore an innocent animal in need of help—even if that animal did have the potential of becoming a spear in his side. The merman had been around long enough to know not to act prematurely and corner a wounded sea lion no matter how harmless it looked. They were still large predators with sharp teeth and a nasty temperament when threatened, easily outweighing a merman’s body weight by four to six times.

Naruto would know. Scarring at the base of his tail was the nasty souvenir he acquired from his last encounter with one. Damn thing thought he’d make a fun chew toy. Lesson learned the hard way that sea lions were packed full of dense muscle and were surprisingly agile and fast. Never again would he make that mistake—even if this one did appear particularly skinny and slow.

Naruto continued to spy on the animal until the sun lowered, the water turning dark and difficult to see through. Predictably, the sea lion decided to call it a day as well and returned back to shore where he slept at night, and Naruto went back to his ship wreck.

The blond was pleasantly surprised that a whole day had passed without even once thinking about his daily routines. Naruto couldn’t remember that last time anything captured his attention like that for such a long period of time. What was even more surprising was that the culprit was a strange seal-type animal. Not another merman or even a dolphin.

Maybe it was a good thing the sea lion managed to make it to the island after all.

But Naruto knew that it couldn’t stay here forever. The sea lion needed to go at some point, the sooner the better. But for the time being…he’d watch it from the distance. That had to be safe enough. In the very least it would make for great entertainment, the blond thought as he drifted off to sleep.

The following day the little merman woke up earlier than usual, anticipation and excitement rejuvenated his tired body. Eager to find out whether or not the defective sea lion made it through the night. For all Naruto knew, the land could’ve been teaming with more dangerous predators than the sea. Although, he found that highly doubtful. Or else the sea lion would’ve chosen the ocean to sleep in—no matter how stupid it was. Survival instinct always won in the end.

_Dang it, why was he even thinking about the stupid sea lion so early in the day?_
For some reason he couldn’t get the creature out of his head. His first priority should’ve been to find food—since he skipped a whole day without eating, to busy stalking the new arrival. Definitely not about checking the health status of the new island invader. He had no idea why he found it so interesting when there was nothing truly remarkable about the beast. Naruto had every right to be annoyed with the creature invading his turf, but for some reason he couldn’t find it in him to hate it.

Chalk it up to loneliness, he supposed. Even so…it was still unusual for him to feel this way about any creature outside of his fellow merfolk. Gamakichi and Gamatatsu were the only other two that held a deep place in his heart. It was so messed up. One strange creature comes around and his whole life gets turned upside down...

After snatching up a quick breakfast of snapper, Naruto caught a second one for the half-starved sea lion. Placing the fresh fish onto the same rock that his new neighbor used to exit the sea with, he figured it wouldn’t hurt to give the sea lion a hand; as long as it was out of his way, that is. It was possible it wouldn’t use the same path twice but it was worth a shot.

Naruto’s long tail whipped back and forth gracefully as he swam back to his observation rock. He flattened his body against the cool hard surface as he waited the arrival of his new and unsuspecting guest.

It didn’t take long before the dolphin brothers interrupted his little peep show. They nudged his side playfully, apparently missing his company after skipping out on them yesterday. Playfully nudging them back, Naruto clicked no then gently pushed their long snouts away using both hands. He felt bad for ditching them once again, but he was too intrigued with the sea lion to go off and play with them today.

The brothers took the hint after a few more persistent jabs and left as quickly as they came, chasing after an unfortunate stingray passing by.

Naruto smirked, dolphins were really easy to please.

The merman didn’t have to wait very long for the sea lion to reemerge back into the ocean. Entering in the same general area as the previous day. His tail flicked with excitement. Happy that it made it through the night, even with the hard mask still being on, making it difficult for the animal to breathe and eat.

But it was still alive. So that was good.

Naruto scrutinized its every movement, taking note that the beast was still as clumsy and awkward in the water as he remembered last. The sea lion remained oblivious to the merman’s presence as it nonchalantly explored the reef while Naruto kept it safe by keeping sharp lookout for predators. Handicapped sea lions would make a tasty meal and easy prey for any hungry shark nearby. That’s not the kind of attention Naruto needed around his reef.

TBC…

Chapter End Notes

Hmmm...Naruto doesn't have a very high opinion of Sasuke now does he? Hehe
Sasuke's POV will be in this story too.

Hope you enjoyed it. Next chapter will be posted next week!
A couple days later and Naruto was still watching over the sea lion closely. Every day he woke up extra early to catch two, good sized fish, saving one for himself and one for the dimwitted fur seal later. The rest of the day was spent huddled up against his favorite rock, observing the sea lion’s abnormal behavior at a respectable distance. Eventually growing so attached to it that he even named it Flatface—for obvious reasons.

Naruto was happier than he’d been for a long time. The reasoning was ridiculous and remained an enigma to the young merman. He had no clue as to why the moronic sea lion (who wasn’t even aware of Naruto’s existence) would strike his fancy. And yet—somehow—it did. He’s just come to learn to accept that.

The premises behind the logic might’ve been unsound, but that didn’t stop Naruto from enjoying the mindless entertainment that the clumsy creature offered freely. Simply stated, Flatface was a fun specimen to watch. Naruto enjoyed the challenge of guessing what the animal was trying to accomplish or do next.

The majority of the time Flatface just spent it floating at the surface like a dead fish, hovering above the shallowest sections of reef. Every time that he (or she) did that Naruto would grow concerned for its health, then Flatface would dive again and all tension would drain from his body.

A few times a day Flatface would take a break and leave the water, for whatever reasons the animal seemed to require. Naruto couldn’t fully understand it because the creature certainly wasn’t exerting himself all that much. Either way, Flatface would always return back to his previous location after the break. During that time he went away, the blond would always investigate every spot the sea lion poked his nosey snout around in extra carefully. Nothing was ever amiss. No dead fish, no scratching of the coral, or anything else really that would catch his attention or cause concern. It was so odd.

What the heck was the sea lion doing all that time?

It almost seemed like Flatface just wanted to look at fish all day long—like Naruto often did with pretty shells and other shiny objects.

But who else would do that? It didn’t make any sense. No other sea creature that Naruto knew of would be more interested in looking at fish rather than eating them.

It baffled Naruto so much that his brain started to hurt. Which probably was the very reason for his obsession with the dumb animal in the first place. Until he figured out why it behaved in the way it
did, he couldn’t go back to living life like the way it was before. His curious nature was too strong, preventing him from losing interest until the mystery was solved. Only once it was solved would he happily scare off Flatface…preferably before he took over Naruto’s feeding grounds.

Today was a different story though.

Flatface was more daring than Naruto’s ever seen before, venturing far off into the deepest section of the reef. Usually Naruto wouldn’t mind where the oblivious animal wandered, but that specific section of corals housed an assortment of dangerous critters ranging from venomous sea snakes, hostile eels, venom-tipped rock and lion fish, to a very territorial octopus.

Naruto was on edge.

Developing an alliance with the more temperamental fish in that area was no small task. Year of patience, respect, and bribes was what it took. Nothing that the sea lions ever acquired. Still, even with all that hard work Naruto’s invested in, there was still always an invisible line between him and the difficult sea creatures that he knew better than to cross.

Lines a retarded sea lion would never be able to comprehend.

After all, the sea lion was far less intelligent and adaptable than any merman. Trouble was bound to occur if Flatface got too close. One wrong poke in the wrong hole was all it would take for the fur seal to potentially be in real danger.

So, Naruto stuck by extra close and remained ever vigilant, uncaring if he was spotted by his secret friend or not. Safety was the only thing that mattered to him now.

Naruto grew more irritated the closer he got to Flatface…

Even out in the open the dense sea lion still didn’t notice him yet. Not that it was very surprising considering the animal he was dealing with…but still, how oblivious could the thing be, and yet still remain alive after all this time?! Far more intelligent animals go down for not being observant enough, Naruto could personally attest to that, and they were all a hell of a lot more observant than this dumb beast.

Tension coiled through his muscles, growing more intense with every passing second the young merman spent on babysitting duty. Nothing was happening when Flatface hovered lightly over a family of brightly colored Favites and Brain corals, giving all the sea creatures enough space, but then something caught the sea lions eye, causing him to jerk away suddenly and scrape a fin over a particular set of corals that belonged to Killer B. That’s when Naruto knew some bad shit was about to go down.

Typically nice, gentle, and inquisitive, Killer B was a territorial male octopus that avoided any conflict unless an intruder came too close to his home. For the excellent reason of owning prime real-estate, the octopus had no other choice but to be fiercely protective over his home and surrounding areas. Any female octopus wandering nearby would be proud to be called his mate from his hidden display of strength and power just because he lived there. However, keeping control over the unmatched turf meant he’d have to be super aggressive to ward off all the other competitors.

Only the strongest octopus could live in this area, and Killer B was top puss.

Naruto shrieked in warning but it was already too late. Eight red legs shot out of Killer B’s home and latched securely around Flatface’s head, suffocating the already troubled breathing seal lion.

Bubbles stirred up in the water as Flatface struggled to unglue himself from the octopus’s sticky web
of tentacles. Limbs clawed uselessly at his mask in a flurry of movement. Fighting hard, Flatface remained impressively calm and collected until something happened with his mask that caused a geyser of bubbles to erupt from the back of his head like a spitting volcano. Full panic set in after that. The sea lion’s movements became jerky and erratic in its feeble attempt at prying the octopus off. But it was useless against Killer B’s steady grip and spongy body.

Naruto was feeling pretty guilty now that he hadn’t removed the hunk of human garbage from the sea lions face earlier. Then, at least, Flatface would have a proper means of defense. Sharp, pointy canines meant everything for a predator. So the poor thing was completely defenseless in this state.

Rapidly depleting bubbles sizzled out from the back of the sea lion, all too soon they were mostly gone. Somehow Naruto pieced together that this meant Flatface was no longer able to breathe. Certain death would be the outcome if he didn’t act fast. There were no second chances or lucky shots when it came down to asphyxia.

Naruto shot forward, the water churned up behind Naruto, leaving a trail of white bubbles thrown around from the fast, vigorous swipes of his tail. Within seconds he reached the struggling seal lion, immediately digging his tiny clawed fingertips in the sliver of space between the tentacle and mask then yanked hard. Half of Killer B’s body pulled off, but then the stubborn animal would just latch right back on with its sticky suction cups and gelatin-like body the moment Naruto went for the next tentacle. The struggle took longer than he would’ve liked and Flatface grew noticeably weaker with every second that passed by.

Naruto always thought that sea lions could last a whole lot longer without breathing. Apparently not this one…Flatface was special.

Time was quickly running out. Using a last ditch effort to fend off Killer B, the blond sunk his canines into one of the fleshy tentacles, biting the appendage clean off.

It worked!

Killer B instantly released Flatface and retreated back to the safety of his den.

Naruto felt terrible for being forced to hurt an innocent animal that was just trying to protect its home —especially one that he’s worked so hard in developing a symbiotic relationship with. All that respect and trust he painstakingly gained over time was likely all gone now.

Unable to dwell on the past right now, Naruto snapped out of his brief moment of grief. This was no time for a pity party. Flatface still needed his help. And besides, it was definitely worth it in the end —probably. It’s not like Naruto was just going to casually swim around while watching as his new obsession slowly suffocate to death without doing anything about it.

By the time the fight was over the sea lion’s body had gone limp and unresponsive. Urgently, Naruto wrapped an arm around the animal’s waist then delivered him to the surface. Confusion shrouded his mind after touching Flatface for the first time. From what he had remembered about sea lions was that they all had thick, coarse and oily fur— not the strange, elastic and rubbery skin Flatface had. Naruto shrugged it off as another one of the anomalies that made up Flatface’s unique traits.

But what if he’s been wrong this whole time? That maybe Flatface wasn’t a sea lion at all. That maybe he was a different species altogether, Naruto couldn’t help but think. Either way, the little merman did know one thing for certain—That Flatface needed air to breathe.

Treading water with Flatface’s heavy frame in his arms was awkward and difficult for the small merman. Naruto struggled to hold the heavy sea lion above surface. Unsure of how much longer he
would be able hold him up before they both went under again.

Everything had happened so fast. Too fast. Chaos and the sudden spike of adrenaline overwhelmed the blond, preventing him from thinking clearly. In any other circumstance, Naruto would’ve thought to carry Flatface to the nearest rock—or at least closer to shore—instead of risk drowning him. But he ended up panicking instead, and decided biting off the mask would be a better plan. He was still convinced the blasted thing was hindering Flatface’s airways.

With both hands still preoccupied, Naruto gnawed the damned thing covering up the sea lion’s face until the sea lion twitched in response—right before he thrashed violently in Naruto’s arms with full body shutters. Losing his grip, the sea lion slid free. But thankfully Naruto didn’t have to worry much because Flatface had regained enough consciousness to remember how to swim—or, at least float.

Still trapped behind the clear hard mask, the moment Flatface snapped back to reality his dark eyes flashed wild when they locked onto Naruto’s for the first time. Bulging wide with fear and disbelief. With a muffled cry, the sea lion jerked away reactively, splashing frantically at the water’s edge to keep afloat.

That was the first time Naruto’s ever heard the sea lion emit any vocal notes, and it peaked his interest to find out what other noises it could make. But first, there were important rules than needed to be set in place. After all, he didn’t want the sea lion mistaking him for food or competition now that he knows of Naruto’s existence.

Asserting dominance, Naruto bared his serrated teeth and flared out his fins at the stunned sea lion, appearing much larger and more intimidating than he really was. To be on the safe side, he added a whooping bellow of his own—just to make sure the dumb animal took the hint and never forgot that this was Naruto’s turf, not Flatface’s.

Although, all that was probably unnecessary. Naruto seriously doubted that Flatface could ever take him on if he couldn’t even win a battle against a much, much smaller octopus.

Overkill or not, the message was received loud and clear as Flatface took off in the opposite direction, ungracefully splashing away as his legs and arms scissored up and down in a pathetic attempt at getting away quickly. Naruto sighed. Even though it was the fastest he’s ever seen Flatface move, it was still considered very slow by merman standards.

For the rest of the day the sea lion remained absent—not that Naruto expected to see Flatface so soon after that encounter. The following day there were still no signs of his nosey neighbor, and Naruto was starting to suspect that Flatface might’ve left the island altogether.

Maybe he’d been a little too assertive? The thought left a bitter aftertaste in his mouth.

Sure, the sea lion must’ve been shaken up pretty badly after a near death encounter, and his little display of dominance probably didn’t help much, but he didn’t think he’d gone that far out of bounds—considering the circumstances. It was never his intension to scare off Flatface for good…at least not yet. There was still plenty of enjoyment to be had watching the strange animal’s goofy antics and unpredictable behavior.

Sadly, by the third day, Naruto had given up his search for Flatface. He stopped leaving food on the rock. Stopped monitoring the shallows in hopes of finding a set of large black fins. Everyday life (prior to the one where a sea lion wandered in and flipped his world upside down) resumed as per usual. Like Flatface never existed in the first place.
Like it had all been just a dream...

Later that evening, Naruto felt particularly pent-up and frustrated—for no apparent reason! His foul mood annoyed the dolphin brother’s to the point where even they couldn’t deal with his broody attitude. Those sneaky torpedo assholes took off in the middle of cleanup duty!

Fine…whatever, he didn’t need them to have a good time anyways. His private luxurious oasis in the middle of the island was what he really needed. Some personal alone time would do him some good.

_Dark, intelligent eyes flashed back in his memory. A brief spark of recognition and gratitude glimmered behind those onyx-colored orbs before growing wide with fear. The strangled shout. The raw panic and confusion._

That wasn’t all Naruto remembered, there were many good parts too. Like the surprising friendliness and gentleness the sea lion displayed with Gamakichi and Gamatatsu and every other creature he came across—

_Fuuuuck!_

Why’d he have to go and screw up a good thing just to prove his machoness? He should’ve trusted his gut instincts that Flatface was not threat. Naruto—out of all mermen—should’ve known better than to judge an entire species from one example alone.

Now Flatface was gone and there was nothing he could do about it. There was no going back to the way things used to be before. Gone was the potential friend he never got the chance to make…

Yeah, a little RNR was exactly what he needed right now. For that he was certain.

All this emotional baggage was making his scales itch and stomach turn to knots. He wasn’t accustomed to this much drama. Usually the merman’s life was quiet and peaceful—with the exception of playtime with the dolphin brother’s. But for some strange reason, Flatface managed to fill a void deep within Naruto that he didn’t even know was there until the sea lion left, and Naruto wasn’t sure of how to deal with it...

---

Upon entering the lavish spring and breaching the surface, Naruto caught a glimpse of something white out of his peripheral. Something that was never there before. Instinctively, he dove back under then sought shelter behind the nearest rock, curling up into a tight little ball once he found one big enough to hide behind.

When nothing came after him after a few minutes, Naruto peaked his head out of the flowy caudal fins and scanned the area. Blue eyes pointed sharply at the waterfall—the location where he last spotted the foreign entity.

Standing tall beneath the falling spray, a pale creature—no, a _man_—bathed in knee deep water. His slim figure was sculpted with lean muscles and hard edges. Everything from his waist up appeared very similar in structure to Naruto’s, but that’s where the similarities end. Instead of a tail below the waist, the human had a set of long legs with no differentiation in skin tone, remarkably resembling a land dwelling version of himself.
The blond never would’ve guessed that Homosapien’s appeared so closely related to merfolk after the stories he’s heard.

Then it suddenly hit him.

Everything clicked in place together like inserting the final piece of the puzzle.

The handicapped sea lion was not a sea lion at all. He was a human all along. More specifically—this man.

Naruto gasped and shrunk back behind the rock once more, but this time he was unable tear his gaze away. Flatface hadn’t noticed him yet and Naruto was a safe distance away…so there was no real harm in a little more spying, right? Besides, Naruto already knew he could outswim Flatface in his sleep. Plus, spying on the sad sea lion impressionist was kinda his thing anyways. So the merman continued covertly watching the legendary creature, big blue eyes glued on his secret obsession.

Whenever Flatface would reach up and scrub his hair, rippling muscles on his back would flex and play beneath his taut skin. And whenever the sunlight struck him at a certain angle, the man’s shiny black hair would reflect a blue tint to it. Cropped in short, shoulder length layers, his fine hair was striking against the pale complexion. Adding mystery and enticement to Flatface’s already dark eyes.

Typically Naruto hated pale skin. Unnatural and gangly, he viewed it as a sign of sickness. Developed over a lengthy period time of hiding away from the life-giving sun for so long. Yet, Flatface had thick, healthy looking skin that seemed perfectly suited on him.

Maybe all humans came in this color pattern?

Normal or not, the merman was still tempted to run his hands over him to find out if his skin was as soft as it looked or was it rubbery like it before?

Entranced, Naruto patiently watched the human scrub his body with a peculiar rock that turned to suds. He would’ve been more curious about a bubble making rock, but the blond’s focus was captivated by the way the man’s skin glowed like the moonlight reflecting off the softy sandy beach during a full moon night. Creamy white with a subtle tint of color that complimented him greatly. Almost otherworldly in its beauty against his contrasting dark features.

Flatface was truly a marvel.

The complete opposite to Naruto’s bright yellow hair, expressive big blue eyes, and vivid yellow-orange-red tail. He reminded the young merman of a banded sea krait—striking in its simplistic colors in an unconventional way.

The merman continued staring at the man, helpless to turn away. Although, he definitely should. Be getting the hell out of here, that is. Humans caused trouble wherever they went and posed a serious threat to all merpeople. He should really leave now, hide away in his little room on the ship….but he didn’t. Instead, he continued watching the man like a captivated guppy lured in by an anglerfish’s snare, just like Flatface has done to him since day one.

The only difference now was that he finally knew the true identity of Flatface.

His weird obsession with Flatface never made any sense. Flatface made a terrible sea lion (when Naruto believed that’s what he was), and Naruto should not be equally—if not more—drawn to the human version of him. Rather, he should be terrified and plotting a way to get rid of the island invader…outside of eating him, of course. Because he couldn’t do that…
Not when he’s grown so attached to Flatface and felt miserable without his awkward company around.

Naruto must have zoned out at some point in time because all of a sudden he was staring back into cold, dark eyes. The human must’ve turned around and was now staring right back at him when he hadn’t been paying attention.

Oh shit.

In a flash, Naruto flipped his body over, vanishing beneath the water’s surface and out of the man’s line of site. The blond made his way home in record time, safely hidden away from all predator’s and humans alike.

Shitshitshit! What had he just gotten himself into? What had he just done!

There was so much to process in such a short amount of time. He needed to think things through and come up with the right answer quickly, or it could potentially cost his life and all the other precious lives of his people.

Fuck, he had been so foolish! So ignorant and selfish and completely stupid!

Worst of all was that Naruto already knew that he couldn’t rip Flatface to shreds, like his family would expect him to—demand him to. But…he still couldn’t risk the human calling for backup and eradicating or capturing every last living mermaid and merman.

Unknowingly, Naruto had made the worst possible mistake EVER by getting too close to the one species capable of mass destruction, mass habitat loss, and large scale extinction. And now it was up to him to fix the mess he created in the first place.

Fuuuck

He had a lot of work to do…

Chapter End Notes

What will Naruto choose to do?

Up next will be Sasuke’s and Naruto’s first real encounter.

If you enjoyed this chapter please leave a review!
After a long, sleepless night, Naruto finally came up with a plan: Befriend the enemy. It was a major risk, sure, but befriending animals of all types was kinda his thing. If it wasn’t food and didn’t plan on eating him, then it was a potential friend in his books. While his parents would be disappointed with his choice of action, there was no way the blond could bring himself to kill the human. That wasn’t the type of merman he was.

The plan was far from perfect. There was a high chance this could bite him in the tail fin, not to mention the process could take a very long time if the humans remained scared of him. Question was, how much time could he spare before Flatface posed a serious risk by attracting other human?

Naruto would have to be the first to reach out to build up the trust between them. Bribes and gifts worked best from his experience. If he could pull it off, then hopefully the end result would benefit each party and no one would get hurt in all of this. So it was definitely a good thing he saved Flatface’s life from Killer B. That act of selfless kindness should’ve given him some credit. All he needed was to find a way to get the human back in the water so he could show him (definitely a him) that he meant no harm.

What better way to show the dark-haired neighbor that he meant no harm than with a nice gift from his personal stash?

So, the merman shuffled around the many object lying around his room for something that would be appropriate for his human…companion? Friend? Acquaintance? Whatever the proper term it mattered not. If he couldn’t pull this off than Naruto would be royally fucked. His entire species fucked along with him.

No pressure.

Building stress was taking its toll on the exhausted merman. The burden lay heavily on his shoulders like a tangible weight as he searched through his most cherished possessions. Naruto was clueless when it came to human tastes. Having no idea what to give Flatface, the blond grabbed one of nicer human objects he found long ago scavenging through a sunken ship and decided to go with it. It was an elegant and stunning container that fit easily in the palm of his hand.

The small object was rectangular in shape and had a thin, flattened top that could easily come off and reveal a hollowed out center. Naruto loved it for its shiny metallic exterior that matched his tail. Detailed etchings and a variety of pretty gems decorated the sides, adding to the effeminate beauty of the fragile piece which suggested it had once belonged to a female as a gift from a courting male—if homo sapiens had any similarities to merfolk.

Naruto figured it would be considered precious even to humans species by the sheer brilliance of the
piece. Even the corrosive salt from the sea had not tarnished the exquisite object after all this time. So he certainly hoped Flatface would appreciate such a rare offering as it was one of his favorite items. Something Naruto had planned on giving to his future mate someday. However, the chances of that happening were so slim he decided it would be better suited as a peace offering, now with his life on the line and all.

Soft, early mornings rays warms his scales as he delivered the dazzling cube to the same rock he used to place fish on top. The golden artifacts gleamed brilliantly in the sunlight as is sat upon the center of the small rock like offering placed on an altar.

All the fish Naruto had left Flatface on that rock prior to the recent incident had been consumed. And he believed that the sea lion—no, human—was the one to take it. That, or a hungry seagull got a free meal. Either way, Naruto figured the chances of the human receiving the gift were pretty good.

Instead of loitering around the reefs, secretly anticipating a set of black fins to enter, the young merman purposely stayed away today—from both the shallows and his coveted cove. Days have gone by since spotting Flatface in the reefs so it wasn’t likely the human was going to be around anyways. Rather, Naruto chose to be productive and rejoin his neglected friends, Gamakichi and Gamatusu, feeling bad for moping around and being so distant with the dolphin brothers.

When Naruto returned later that night to check on the box, it was nowhere in sight. Satisfied the human male received the offering, Naruto slept peacefully. The next morning he deposited a massive bleached clam shell filled colorful sea glass shards and another snapper for bonus points. A string of pearls that he made himself a while back and another damn fish the day after that. Each day the items were taken but there was still no sign of Flatface. And Naruto was starting to get irritated at this point.

Really, how greedy could that stubborn bastard be? Those were some damn fine offerings. To have nothing to show for it—the dark-haired man was getting on his last nerves.

Was it possible his parents were right all along?

That humans couldn’t be reasoned with and Naruto should just eat the guy?

No, that was a big fat no.

The blond cringed at just thinking about it. He couldn’t possibly eat a species that resembled his own kind so closely. The boy had a hard enough time hunting innocent fish just to survive. Any intelligent creature, as far as he was concerned, was off the dinner menu.

Tension increased with every day past with no signs progress. Naruto was running out of valuables he’d think the human would enjoy and was getting closer to aborting the mission. But on the fourth day all that changed.

Naruto found a small handful of flat metallic disks on the ‘altar rock’ that resembled the colors of his tail, shiny and golden. Made from the same material as the cube he had given the man. And the blond merman absolutely loved it! Not only was it the first gift he had received from Flatface, but it was and a sure sign that a peaceful negotiation was possible.

Thrilled with the new development, Naruto stashed the newly acquired present proudly on a mantel in his nest. His stomach fluttered with giddy excitement. In all his life he’s never once received a gift before. While he always had everything he needed to survive, the sentimental gift still felt nice and was the cause for this unfamiliar warm feeling in his heart. *Did the human get this feeling when Naruto brought him gifts?*
After safely storing the gold disks, Naruto made his way back into the shallows and that’s when he spotted a familiar set of black fins paddling rather leisurely over the reef bed.

Temporarily stunned, his sapphire-blue eyes stared wide in disbelief. He was so close to giving up altogether, thinking the human had either fled the island or was planning his demise, but now it seemed Flatface was giving Naruto the opportunity he’d been waiting for to have a proper introduction. After all, Naruto was the one responsible for holding off the encounter in the first place, and he totally blew it out of proportion with the aggressive intro.

This time around he was going to make a good first-second time impression, that’s for sure.

With great care, the merman made sure to keep enough distance to not startle the dark-haired human. The same distance he’s used before. His golden-yellow tail moved with stealth and grace through the water as he waited patiently for Flatface to look his away. For the first time Naruto wanted the human to spot him. And it didn’t take very long for Flatface to notice the bright-eyed merman.

Flatface flinched when he spotted Naruto, yet remained in the water this time. Thankfully there was no running away. That had to be a good sign.

Naruto swam in wide circles around the nervous man, careful not to appear hostile in anyway so they could observe each other properly. He made sure to keeps his movements lax and posture nonthreatening. His crimson side fins swayed in the current like fine silk in a breeze, no longer sharp and posturing like the last encounter with the human. Rather they were used to attract attention in a soothing manor. It seemed to be working as Flatface relaxed fractionally.

The evaluation went on like that for a while. Both merman and human eyed each other up, observing every subtle movement and facial expression with shark-like precision as the lower half of Naruto’s body swayed back and forth hypnotically through the clear water like a sea serpent.

Being the master race of the sea, Naruto decided he should be the first to make a move. Only when Flatface appeared calm did the blond approach closer until they were nearly in reach of each other. The close proximity had the man understandably tense up again, but otherwise he remained motionless.

Disliking the mask covering the humans intriguing face, Naruto reached for it and pried it off with some difficulty. But the straightforward action caused Flatface to start and swim back to the surface in a hurried pace with his eyes squeezed shut.

Disappointment stabled at the merman’s chest like a serrated stingray barb when returned to the surface. He really did just wanted to see the man’s true face again. Frowning, Naruto watched the startled man paddle further and further away. He chose not to pursue in case it aggrieved Flatface further. However, hope was soon returned when the human used his hands to gesture ‘up’ as he waited at the surface.

Did he want Naruto to join him at the surface?

But…why?

Choosing to obey the silent command, the merman floated up until his blond mop poked out of the water, inches away from the human who was treading water. Being so close to memorizing inky back eyes made Naruto forget he could breathe air, albeit temporary. The gills on the side of his neck opened and closed uselessly in the ocean breeze until he suddenly remembered to swallow in air through his mouth like land crawlers did. Oxygen inflated his lungs and Naruto could breathe again while Flatface watched his rather awkward attempt at breathing with fascinated humor in his eyes
and a smirk on his lips.

It took all of five seconds for the blond to realize the guy was an asshole by the man’s smug expression alone. Although, he was a tantalizing and handsomely exquisite asshole.

Wait, what? Where the fuck did that come from? They weren’t even the same species as each other. Attractiveness shouldn’t even be on the scale of possibility. And yet, he couldn’t help but admire the similarities in the human’s structure.

Flatface made the next move and closed the distance between them. His exposed hand reached out, hesitantly brushing over Naruto’s upper arm while his dark eyes fixated on the spot where their bodies met. Startled, the blond merman made a high-pitched inhuman sound deep within the back of his throat the moment their skin touched.

Instinctively Naruto pulled back and nipped at Flatface’s finger, the coppery taste of blood dripped hot on his tongue. Immediately he let go of the man’s digit after hearing him gasp in alarm. Naruto paced agitated, trying to calm himself down while the human froze with fear. It was so stupid for Flatface to simply touch another creature with such familiarity when they were anything but! On the other hand, Flatface was never the brightest to begin with. He was lucky to have not lost that finger or worse.

Flatface seemed to be struggling with what to do next. As Naruto calmed down further, the man made a consoling noise that threw him off balance. Naruto’s ears twitched forward with interest upon hearing the man’s soft baritone notes, his voice soothing to Naruto’s ears.

“Sorry, sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you. Fuck. Just how—how is this even possible?” Flatface muttered to himself in awe. “Can you understand what I’m saying?” he blurted out before realizing how stupid that sounded.

Naruto tilted his head curiously. Unknowing of what the strange man was saying but enjoying the one-sided conversation none the less.

“No, wait, of course you can’t. That’s stupid to even think you could understand any English.”

He didn’t mind. Naruto could listen to his voice all day long and be content with it, even though he wouldn’t understand a word the human said.

“Damn it... And now I’m rambling to a fish boy.” The human’s handsome features shifted from one of astonishment to being perplexed as he tried to figure out how to communicate with a merman. Naruto just found it funny as Flatface grew more frustrated and bewildered by the minute.

Finally, the dark-haired man decided on a simple introduction, pointing to his dark and rubbery patted chest and said, “Sas-uke,” in a slow, draw out pronunciation. He repeated this two more times before Naruto figured out what he was saying.

Sasuke was the human’s given name.

However, the tables were turned when ‘Sasuke’ indicated for Naruto to give his name. But the embarrassing truth was he couldn’t remember his name. It had been so many years since he heard it spoken last. His golden brows scrunched in concentration, feeling stupid and insecure that he wasn’t even able to immediately recall it when there was finally someone who took an interest in him and had the ability to form complex words. The one word that belonged to him and made up his identity.

Shitshitshit.
What was his name?

He remembered it starts with an N...

Noah?

Definitely not.

Nagga?

No.

Naru?

No, but getting warmer.

Narrr…u…to? That sounded right. Naruto.

Yeah, that was it!

“Naruto!” he shouted excitedly, not realizing he was still using his underwater voice.

The human squinted his eyes and covered his ears in obvious discomfort from the high pitched squeaks coming from the blonde’s mouth. Clearing his throat, Naruto tried again but slower this time and with his surface voice. After a few more failed attempts, he was finally able to get a closer version of it.

“Narrr…uuto,” he said. The word came out raw and ragged from years of neglect. The R rolled off his tongue in a growl and the U continued on longer than proper, yet clear enough for Sasuke to understand. “Narrruto,” the merman repeated more coherency this time around.

“Naruto?” The dark-haired man advised in that silky smooth voice of his. His name rolled off the man’s tongue in a way that sounded sensual and new. Naruto wanted to hear him repeat it over and over again. It amazed him how such a simple word could make him feel all giddy and warm inside like when he had received the shiny gift from the man. “Is that your name—Naruto?”

The merman chirped excitedly (in a much lower pitch this time) and slapped his big tail fin against the water’s surface in confirmation. His cerulean eyes lit up brighter than the sky above.

Naruto’s childlike antics appeared to both amuse and intrigue the young-ish looking man. This time he attempted repeating the man’s name back to him but failed. K’s were apparently hard for him to pronounce and the S’s sounded like a hiss. And the guy had a lot of those in his name. Focusing on the way the human said it, Naruto adjusted his vocals to match the human’s pitch almost perfectly.

“Ssasuke,” he finally managed to get out after intense concentration.

Dark eyes widen fractionally at his name being pronounced from a merman—in his exact voice! “My god, that’s so creepy. Please don’t do that again, Naruto.”

Only understanding the word Naruto, the blond repeated Sasuke’s name back to him with in same copy-cat tone with a wide toothy grin on his face, thrilled that he could even communicate with the dark-haired man at all.

Sasuke just shook his head back and forth defeatedly and started swimming back to shore.

Put-out by the suddenly somber shift in mood, Naruto frowned and followed the guy as far as he
could, his long tail dragging in the sandy bottom when it got to shallow. Sasuke suddenly stopped and turned back around, facing the blond. Now that Sasuke was standing to full height, his imposing body towering over Naruto’s flattened, low lying frame causing a spike of fear for the smaller merman. Naruto reeled back, not liking this new and threatening position at all.

Just as he did that Sasuke seemed to realize his mistake and lowered himself slowly back in until the salty water lapped at his neckline and his knees rested on the soft sandy bottom. Only when Naruto appeared satisfied did he dare move his hands up and out of the water, splaying his fingers wide with palms facing outwards in a submissive position.

“Shit, shit. I’m sorry Naruto!” the strange man apologized, keeping his tone composed as to not frighten the fish boy more. But his dark eyebrows remained furrowed in frustration and uncertainty, like it was the first time he’s ever encountered a language barrier with another species before. Naruto was envious of that. That was pretty much all he has ever experienced in his young life. “I didn’t mean to scare you. Fuck…this is crazy—”

Putting on a gentle smile to illustrate to Sasuke he meant no harm, Naruto approached closer, doing his best to show the inexperienced human that he sorta understood his friendly intentions from reading his body language—even though the man was doing it all wrong.

Clearly one should lower one’s eyes and make themselves appear smaller and less intimidating to the offended party. Not make themselves look bigger by raising their hands and locking eyes. Most species would consider that a challenge and probably chose to fight back or flee. But Naruto was able to tell it was Sasuke’s unique version of surrender, mostly because of the harmless look in his eyes slow movements, and the way he lowered his body into the water.

But the human’s strange and unpredictable behavior intrigued Naruto like no other. Sasuke’s unique traits were what made him so interesting in Naruto’s eyes in the first place, to the point where he even risked exposure. A human was something new and exciting to the merman. An intelligent species, yet he had no clue how to behave in a foreign environment. And the similarities in biological appearance baffled the young merman.

Maybe that’s the real reason he risked it all. No other creature that Naruto knew of even remotely resembled a merman. So he naturally desired to learn more about this creature. This was a once in a life time opportunity to be able to communicate with a hated species in a peaceful encounter.

Naruto wanted to be able to speak with the man, in his language. He wanted to know how he got on the island and if there were any others that came with him. He wanted to learn so much about the man and his world that it was suddenly all a little overwhelming. A whole new world was opened up to him. One with real humans in it, not just the items they had left behind or the tragic tales painting them as monsters of the land.

Sasuke smiled softly back and reach his hand out patiently, waiting for Naruto to go to him this time. “Are we good, Naruto?” he asked, nodding his head towards his outreached appendage.

For the first time Naruto had realized the human’s hands were not webbed like his own, but hey were still similar in shape. Curiously, Naruto sniffed at the hand, then tentatively touched it with his own pointed clawed tip after the human chuckled at him like Naruto was the one acting silly for smelling it in the first place.

Stupid human. Wasn’t the ‘sniff test’ the general rule and greeting for all creatures? Humans, once again, must’ve been the exception to that rule. It seemed more and more likely that everything was an exception when it came to homo sapiens.
Sasuke sucked in a breath when their fingers touched. His short, trimmed nails brushed over the merman’s tiny claws with the lightest touch. The pads of his fingers tailed up Naruto’s sensitive skin. Sasuke’s hand delicately traced up the merman’s red-orange hued hand, his forearm, and paused when he reached the blond’s upper arm as he took it all in. Enchantment shinning bright in his piercing gaze.

Goosebumps raised on Naruto’s forearms and he could not suppress the shiver that racked up his spine. It’s been so long since he’s felt skin so similar to his own touch any part of his body. And he was amazed how warm the human was. He would have to bask in the sunlight all day long to even reach a similar core temperature.

Although unaware what the word ‘good’ meant, Naruto assumed it was something positive so he repeated it enthusiastically: “Sasuke. Good.”

With the simple gesture and soft spoken words a bond was formed between the two different species.

Hopefully Naruto had made the right choice...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be written in Sasuke's POV. The update is going to be running a little late. I'm working on a one-shot for Halloween and it's hard focusing on a fluffy story when I'm writing a horror erotica fic. They just don't mix.
“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Sasuke glared at the pilot taking a healthy swig from a flask.

“Relax kid,” the older man grumbled gruffly with a thick Southern twang in his accent. “I’ve been doing this since ‘Nam. I can fly this plane blindfolded, with my hands tied behind my back, and still manage to get you to your momma’s house before dinner’s set on the table.”

“Please don’t,” he said dryly. “Some of us want to live to see another day.”

“What. No faith in the old war vet?” Jiraiya barked out a hoarse laugh, then took another sip of whiskey. “I swear…kids these days. No respect.”

“Oh, I respect your abilities as a pilot just fine. That’s why I’m paying you a small fortune to get me to where I need to go. But don’t think for one second that I won’t throw your old ass out of the plane if you put my life in danger.”

“Ha! I knew I liked you boy,” he hollered, slapping Sasuke’s knee. “Them are some brass balls you got on ya. Ain’t no one threaten me like that in decades. Smoke?” the man named Jiraiya asked.

For some strange reason, Sasuke wasn’t surprised at all when the pilot dug out a cigar from a messy pile of old manuals and maps littering the floor, and immediately started chewing on the end. Once lit, the pungent smoke filled the small cabin’s air. Sasuke’s nose scrunched with disgust.

The brunette sighed. Just one more distraction the old geezer didn’t need.

Right about now Sasuke really wished he had enough money to afford a more professional pilot. Preferably one that ran a legit business and owned a damned business card. This ‘friend of a friend’ bullshit was not working out in his favor. But he did check the man’s background before hiring him for the job, and Sasuke was impressed with what he saw.

Jiraiya had an impeccable record with far more flight experience than any other affordable option. He’s been flying longer than Sasuke’s been alive. That had to count for something.

He was also the only one who would accept the job…

“No, I’m good. I quit two years ago,” he informed.

“Pfff. No fun. You only live once, boy. Learn to live a little.”

The two-seater float plane rattled violently after encountering a rough patch of turbulence. Sasuke
gripped the sidebar handle tightly.

“That’s exactly why I quit. I’d like to live long enough to enjoy my life and not have to spend it in the hospital getting chemo,” Sasuke said through clenched teeth. “And for fuck’s sake, stop calling me boy already, it’s creeping me out. I’m thirty year old married man who’s served in the military just like you—I’m no kid.”

Jiraiya blew out a puff of smoke. “Hmm…I’m must say, sweet cheeks, I thought you were younger. You still got that baby face going on, but I’ll admit you’ve got the eyes of someone who’s seen some shit. Damn, Asians. I swear you guy’s never age.”

Sasuke ignored the racist comment, being used to it from the older generation in the military in particular. Not to mention, his old man. But he wasn’t about to open up old wounds with a complete stranger. There were psychologists for that. “What I’ve seen in my lifetime is none of your goddamn business, captain. And call me sweet cakes again, I’ll promise you it’s going to be that last thing you’ll ever say. I’ll cut out your tongue and use it for fish bait,” he snapped.

“Okay, okay, I get it!” Jiraiya hollered, his round gut giggling with suppressed laughter. “Princess has got some sharp claws to go along with those big kahuna’s. You’d be my son if I’d had any rugrats of my own.”

“You’re far too ugly to be my father,” Sasuke smirked nastily.

“Ouch, that hurts!”

The silver-haired man feigned a heart attack, his hand leaving the yoke that controlled the plane’s steering. All of a sudden the small aircraft took a nosedive, rapidly descending to the blue waters of the Atlantic below. Sasuke did not almost just piss himself.

“What the hell are you doing, you crazy old bastard! Are you trying to get us killed?” he shouted over the loud roar of the engine and Jiraiya’s laughter.

God, he hated flying. Really hated it. The rolling waves of the ocean were much more his speed.

“Aww…is the pretty boy scared? And here I thought you said you were a military brat. I take back what I said about having balls of steel. You’re just a little puppy with more bark than bite.”

“And you’re insane!” Sasuke sneered. “Completely out of your goddamn mind. Straighten out this death trap you call a plane or I’m going to report you to the ACPD when we land—if we land.”

“I’m sooo scared,” Jiraiya announced sarcastically. But he did level out the bird. “Call the authority on me if ya want. See if they’d care. Then we can share a nice, cozy cell together when the authorities launch an internal investigation and find out all the FAR, DHS, and DOD regulations that have been violated for this little expedition of yours. If yer lucky we might even be bunk mates. A pretty boy like you won’t last long in prison. There’ll be a lineup of filthy brutes waitin’ to have a go at you. But you’ve got nothin’ to worry ‘bout with me—I’m 100% heterosexual!”

“Fuck you,” Sasuke snarled.

“I just told you, son—I’m heterosexual. Generally that means I like chicks, not dicks.”

Note to self: don’t ever hire this bat-shit-crazy pilot again.

“God damn it, will you just shut up already?” His eyes shot daggers over at the self-amused old geezer. Beyond the mountain of a man Sasuke spotted something outside the window that captured
his interest. “Hey, what about there?” he asked. “That one’s got a sizable reef surrounding the island. And it’s far enough away from any developed nations, making it an ideal location.”

“What…there? That one you say? No, kid. You don’t wanna go there.” Jiraiya chewed on his cigar, a worried expression marring his rugged features. “I’ll tell you what, how ‘bout I take you to the next island we see? There’s another one close by that should be just as good.”

Sasuke peered at him. He was curious as to what could strike fear in a seasoned vet with a death wish. “No. I want to go there,” he insisted. “It’s perfect for what I need. Why don’t you want to land there?”

“You’ll think it’s stupid and won’t believe me,” Jiraiya said after a long pause. His tone was serious in a way that Sasuke’s never heard before. “Your generation don’t listen to old fisherman tales. No respect. Then y’all wonder why yer friends gone missin,” he spat.

“Don’t group me in with the millennial’s,” Sasuke argued darkly. “I do not represent everyone in my generation.”

Jiraiya threw him an assessing glance. He must’ve liked what he saw because he continued after taking a long drag of nicotine from his cigar, smoke blowing out his nostrils.

“No. I suppose you don’t,” he admitted in a raspy voice. “Fine, I’ll tell ya. I suspect yer gonna make me land there anyways, but don’t say I didn’t warn you if ya run into trouble down there. The last thing I need is to have a good-lookin’ white boy go missing on my watch.”

The plane tilted at a 30 degree angle as it circled the forbidden island. Sasuke waited patiently for the man to continue, a familiar buzz of excitement and adrenaline thrumming though his veins. There was something unknown and dangerous about this island, and it only heightened the thrill of adventure and new discovery within in. It’s been too long since he’s felt anything other than bitter regret, anger, self-hatred, and depression. He’d almost forgotten how it felt…

What it was like to be free again.

“That island down there has a bad rap sheet, kid. Ain’t nobody go near that island in over fifty years.” As Jiraiya told the story with conviction, Sasuke listened intently, keeping an open mind even though the man’s sanity was questionable at best. Whatever this man was about to say he believed it down to his core. “The last ship that wandered too close got ambushed by a group of sea creatures living just below the surface. A fight broke out—only one of the three crewmen managed to make it out alive. It was said to be a bloodbath, they never stood a chance.”

“Sea creatures?” Sasuke rose a skeptical brow.

Jiraiya shot him an icy glare.

“What’d I tell ya? I knew you wouldn’t listen,” he growled. “The future of the world is in the hands of a bunch of over-privileged, lazy-ass snowflakes that can’t navigate outside their own driveway without one of those damn iPhone’s glued to their hands. That’s what it’s come down to, I tell ya. And to think I risked my life, along with all those other countless honorable men, just to protect a dead-beat generation!”

“Jesus, man, calm the fuck down! Get it together,” Sasuke breathed. If Jiraiya went all kamikaze on him now neither one of them were making it back to the states in one piece. “Do you need your meds or something? I can get them for you.” Jiraiya shook his head. “Okay, good. Focus man, I need you to land this bird. Can you do that?”
“Yes.”

“Yes.” Sasuke ordered, slipping into his commander role as though he were putting on a glove. “Find an opening and get us down there. I swear—I wasn’t trying to insult you or insinuate that you were lying. Remember, I fought the good fight too. I have only the up most respect for those who serve their country for the greater good. What happened to those sailors was a tragic event and I wish them a better afterlife. But you must understand my skepticism. As a Navy officer, I spent a lot of time out on sea. And the ships that sank out on open sea would often exaggerated the reasoning, or out-right lie about it. Spending days on end without anything to look at but horizon can cause hallucinations. Careless mistakes happen, and many captains are too ashamed to admit fault. However, if what you said about no one entering the island for so decades holds any truth to it, then I think you’re on to something. Maybe not a sea monster, but something else. So what are we talkin’ about here? Did the survivors report great whites…giant squids…Nessy?”

The last option was just to test Jiraiya’s mental stability. He was being too quiet.

“Sirens. The fishing crew reported siren’s. Don’t give me that look, boy.” Jiraiya gave him a disapproving glance. “That’s what they said—Every sailor’s worst nightmare. Is it really so hard to believe when there have been hundreds of reports over the past couple centuries? Still don’t believe me, do you? Well that’s okay, because let me tell you this; even if that story is nothin but folklore, that island is dangerous in and on its own. Countless shipwreck skeletons’ and the remains of many brave men line the bottom of that reef. It ain’t nothin’ but an underwater graveyard down there.”

Sasuke made a mental note to check for pollutants in the water and the soil. With a healthy reef ecosystem in place it was highly improbable that a contaminant was the cause for the islands damnation. Yet the land was volcanic so he had to make sure there weren’t toxins seeping into the air from vents that could cause hallucinations, or other harmful aliments.

Thankfully he remembered to bring a testing kit this time. Often he liked to test the waters purity levels beforehand to determine the clarity for the camera lens and ideal conditions for marine life to flourish. With a few adjustments, he was sure he could figure out how to test the topsoil as well.

“How do you know all of this?”

Jiraiya didn’t say anything for so long that Sasuke almost thought he didn’t hear the question.

“A close friend of mine died trying to get on that island,” the old man finally answered, taking another swig from his flask.

“How?” Sasuke inquired softly. He didn’t expect an answer.

“Doesn’t matter,” Jiraiya frowned, “Keep your head sharp out there, and know that the island is a dangerous place for foolish men searching for something that isn’t there. We can still turn around if you want. Ain’t nobody gonna help you all the way out here if ya run into trouble. And it takes a full day for me to fly out here in an emergency situation. Even then there are no guarantees. Weather changes real quick in these parts, so be sure to keep your satellite phone close by and charged. So—what’ll it be, young man? Still want to risk it?”

“Yes.” Sasuke nodded sharply. Big payoffs didn’t come without a risk, after all. “I’m all in.”

“Well okay then. Here goes nothin,” the captain confirmed, sloping the bird down to land.

Twenty minutes later they landed safely in the shallows, only a couple meters from shoreline. The float plane rocked gently in the waves. Jiraiya slammed the aircraft’s door shut, stepping carefully
onto the pontoon float as not to get wet. He assisted Sasuke with getting out, not that he needed help, and began unloading the carefully packed gear the raven would need in order to survive a month long on a desolate island.

The moment Sasuke’s feet touched the sandy ground he was tempted to kiss the salty earth, but refrained from doing so out of self-respect. He was still on edge from the whole flight experience and Jiraiya’s warning. It didn’t sound like the burly man was pulling his leg. The retired solder truly believed every word he said.

“You sure this is everything you’ll need, son? I’d hate for you to run out of food or water two weeks out. There’s no Wal-Mart on this curse-ed land.”

“Don’t worry about me, pops. I’ve got enough to last much longer than 30 days, if need be. Solar panel battery charger, salt water filter, generator, bagged rice and canned goods, first aid kit, camera equipment and camp gear,” Sasuke listed the items off like it was a back to school list, and not the only items he’d have access to for quite a while.

“Good, because if a storm sweeps through I won’t be able to get you until the weather clears. Don’t forget to keep the sat phone charged and in your camp at all times, and call once a week so that I know you’re still alive.” Jiraiya tossed him a large bag with two heavy oxygen tanks weighing it down. “I’d hate to waist my precious gas on a corpse.”

“Careful, Jiraiya. You almost sound like you care.” Sasuke grunted when the bulky load hit his chest.

Dumping the bags safely on the sandy beach and out of reach from the surf, the brunette sloshed through knee deep water as they worked together to unload all his equipment. There was a lot of it.

“I do care,” Jiraiya looked him up and down somberly, “but I don’t know why. Just be careful, will ya?”

Sasuke grunted a curt yes.

After everything was unloaded Jiraiya said his farewells, adding a few words of advice before taking off on his rickety pontoon plane. Taking a deep breath in, Sasuke soaked in the salty air, warm sun rays, and savored the taste of freedom. Enjoying the moment that it took to digest his new surroundings, and bask in the emptiness of it all.

Thirty days.

That’s how long he would be left alone on the secluded volcanic island somewhere in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle. And it was a welcoming thought.

While most people would be terrified to be thrown into this scenario, Sasuke preferred it over the alternative. No traffic, no electronics (besides the ones he needed for work), and no one poking around his damn business. The island was liberating and peaceful, whereas his life in Miami was anything but.

Tall buildings shadowed the lively city, sticking out like colossal fingers, transforming the flat swampland into a spring break destination for the rest of the countries horny youth and Cuban immigrants’. To Sasuke, the skyscrapers were like giant concrete pillars to his prison. Suffocating, and a constant reminder that he didn’t belong around other people.

That’s not how it used to be though.
He used to be happy. A long time ago. Now he was jaded and saw the world in a blurry haze of alcohol and drugs. Anything to forget his past mistakes.

Anything just to make it through another day.

Nature photography had been the only one good thing how he found after his leave with the US Navy. The only thing that made him feel human anymore.

At first it started out only as a hobby, then developed into something more over time. Sasuke found buyers by going to conventions and art fairs, selling to websites, magazines, and taking in contracts. Little by little, word of mouth spread news of his unique photography style and breathtaking nature shots.

Exotic birds, reptiles, and alligators teaming in the Everglades were his starting subjects. But when he learned about oceanography and the many challenges that came with it, Sasuke just couldn’t resist. It became an obsession. One that didn’t pay much and put a major strain—both financially and physically—on his already rocky marriage with Sakura.

Until he found out she was fucking another guy behind his back. That freed him from a loveless marriage.

Sasuke couldn’t blame her though. He deserved it. He deserved everything he got after what he’d done four years ago and worse. A mistake that cost him the precious lives of his entire unit. A mistake that would haunt him until the day he was resting six-feet under. Until that day came around, he would have to live with the constant guilt and night terrors that plagued his mind 24/7.

As it were, Sasuke was a failure of a man. A poor excuse of a husband. A traitor of a son for serving under a county that nuked his father’s homeland. An executioner to the soldiers who trusted him with their lives. Everything he touched turned to shit.

It would’ve been nice if she didn’t take his dog though. He loved that mutt.

Even though Sakura was the one who broke their marriage vows, he gave her the house without second thought and continued making the payments on the mortgage while paying for his monthly studio apartment rent. And that’s why he took this job.

Renting in Miami and fully supporting his soon-to-be-ex-wife had taken its toll on his bank account. Spiraling further into depression and substance abuse sure as hell wasn’t going to pay the bills. And after Sakura left him for another man three months ago he did just that.

Surviving off Chinese takeout, frozen pizzas, and a bottle of any high proof alcohol that he could get cheaply. Not leaving the dirty apartment for days at a time—often waiting until the smell of trash became too unbearable to handle and he was forced to clean up a little. If he couldn’t get his act together he’d be sleeping on the streets soon enough.

The few friends he managed to stay close with over the years gave him pitiful looks with they came over. After a while he stopped letting them in. He didn’t want their fucking pity. He didn’t want their casserole or their homemade dishes. He didn’t want them to do his laundry or clean the dishes for him. Sasuke was a grown ass man, fully capable of caring for himself. All he need was some time to be left alone. Was that so hard to ask?

However, now that his bank account was too low to afford his guilty pleasures, Sasuke was persuaded to get back up on his feet. Coming to the island was a big risk. One that would cost him what little he had left to his name if he failed this mission. A lot of research and money had gone into
this venture in hopes of finding an undiscovered or rare species of marine life that could potentially cover the cost of the expedition, plus several months’ worth of rent and food.

Miss the mark and he’d be crawling under a bridge for a place to sleep at night—if he could sleep, that is.

Sasuke scanned his surroundings, wincing at the suns reflecting light on the water’s surface. It was everything he could’ve dreamed of and more. Sugar-white sandy beaches, pristine coral reefs, blue skies, and crystal clear water awaited him and his camera.

The best part there was no cell service, no internet, no text messages, no nagging-friends-suddenly-turned-licensed-therapists’, no bills stacking in the mail, and no ex-wives. It was just him and the ocean. His job. His passion.

He didn’t deserve it. A tinge of guilt put a damper on his mood, but only slightly.

Now that he was finally here, standing alone on an exotic tropical island so very far away from home…from his life, all he could think about was why he hadn’t done this sooner. But Sasuke didn’t deserve love. He didn’t deserve happiness. So yeah, he felt guilty for the excitement he felt with being on this island. However, that didn’t stop the foreign muscle from tugging at the corner of his mouth.

For the first time in four long and painful years, filled with nothing but misery and regret, Sasuke cracked a smile.

Yeah, he had made the right choice in coming here.

Even if there was nothing new to discover around the island, this was the place he was supposed to be. For that he was certain now.

With the smile remaining on his face, Sasuke left his things where they laid and scouted the island for a good place to set up camp. There was only for hours of daylight left and he had a lot of work to do if he wanted a place to sleep tonight.

Maybe everything would turn out alright after all.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Sasuke. There is a lot of depression in this fic…

Also a lot of unanswered stuff about his past, but I will cover them all in the upcoming chapters.

And don’t worry guys, Sakura will not be in this (that’s why there are no tags with her name on it). Technically, Sasuke is still married to her, but they are separated and going through the process of divorce. The sole purpose for this is to make his character straight.
Trudging through the hot sand with the harsh sun blaring down on his back, Sasuke could finally admit to himself that the tropical paradise wasn’t everything he dreamt of. There was no 5 star, all-inclusive resort on this island that would cater to his every need. Hell, there wasn’t even a lounge chair or place to grab a cold beverage. This was a job. And one he needed to take seriously if he sought to last the full 30 day voyage.

Being early summer, the temperature was stifling and the humidity matched Florida’s sauna-like conditions. The midday heat meant Sasuke only had a limited time surveying the island before a serious case of dehydration set in. Finding shelter and securing all the gear was imperative when he was sweating faster than he could keep hydrated. Thankfully it didn’t take very long finding an ideal dive spot.

After about 45 minutes of beachcombing, Sasuke came across a small cove that was guarded by a large coral formation with an abundance of marine life flourishing just below the surface. He couldn’t have asked for a better spot. Deep blue pools dotted the bright turquoise surface at random intervals suggesting a variance in depth among the coral bed. But the biggest bonus was the gentle current. The brunette picked up on the many dangerous rip currents lining the coast straight away. He’d be sure to tread carefully when diving in an area containing strong currents. They were seemingly harmless until the current dragged him under a rock where he could end up fighting his way out of a whirlpool, get a concussion from hitting his head, or be torn to shreds from the sharp corals. Two of those scenarios he’s already experienced while serving in the Navy. Neither one of them were very pleasant.

The land surrounding the cove had adequate shelter also, another important factor. A thick tree line stretched across the white sandy beach dunes, which suggested no hurricanes have hit this island in a long time. That was a good thing, of course, yet it also came with its own set of complications.

Sasuke wrested with the prickly palms, ferns and debris that littered the sandy ground, clearing a section out for camp. By the time he was done, blisters, small cuts, and splinters covered his hands. His shirt was drenched with sweat and torn in a few places. All those days spent sulking in the house, eating takeout and drinking bottles of hard liquor were doing him no favors now. He took great care staying in top physical shape, even after the military. But now his body protested the strain after a month or two of neglect.

Sasuke swore under his breath and started jogging back to transfer his gear over. The weight of the overbearing sun beat down on his shoulders, and the glare from the waters reflection and white sand burned his irises, making it that much harder. But the worst part was the thirst. Within the horizon, he was surrounded by clear, beautiful aquamarine water that called out to him like a siren to go and drink from it. To go swim in its otherworldly beauty. Fitting after the story he heard from that strange pilot Jiraiya a short while ago. Being dehydrated and near an abundance of undrinkable water was
physiological torture. But he knew better than to drink unfiltered water from the sea or waste precious time cooling off in it.

Even with his stomach growling, Sasuke pushed forward. Because let’s face it, that was all he really could do now adays. And he couldn’t falter now when there was still so much work to be done before twilight.

By the time Sasuke finished setting up camp the sun had just set. Unfortunately he was too exhausted to enjoy the view while finishing up the final touches. Instead, he sprawled out on the hammock hung up by two palm trees as he ate a dinner of canned beans. As he laid under a sheer mosquito net staring up at the sky, sipping water from a fresh coconut, Sasuke pondered the life events that led him here.

It had been a long day, and an even longer month planning this trip, and just getting to this island was hard to believe. The feeling was surreal and a welcomed break from his haunted past and miserable life back in Miami. For once he was doing something for himself. Taking that next step in life and risking it all for a photograph of something he wasn’t even certain would be here. It was stupid and reckless and used up all of his savings, but he really had nothing else to lose—except, maybe the apartment. Mize well place all bets on the one thing he had left. His love of the ocean.

Sasuke closed his eyes and hummed a soft tune to himself. Never in his life had he felt so free. So at peace with himself. His family, the military, and Sakura never gave him the liberty to explore himself. He’d been used as a tool most his life. Whether it be working for his father, serving the government, or being the perfect husband, no one’s ever cared to ask him what he wanted. In many ways this opportunity was a new beginning for him. A way to rediscover himself and move on from the past. Even if there was nothing new out here to photograph, he’d hope to return home as a new man ready to take on a fresh start in life.

It was about time he started living the way he wanted.

The next morning Sasuke awoke early at the first sign of light. His muscles ached from the previous day’s labor and his mouth was as dry as cotton. He groaned when he rolled out of the hammock, stumbling to the dirt floor like a 60 year old man getting out of bed. Really, his body should be more used to it by now. Sleeping outside in his 30’s was not as it was in his young 20’s after a hard day’s work. It took him a good cup of coffee or two before his body finally loosen up a bit. Only then could he enjoy his surroundings and appreciate the view.

Unraveling a protein bar, the raven chewed his breakfast bar as he walked over to the water. Bright rays of pink, yellow, and blues reflected off the calm surface in a brilliant display of pastels. The Caribbean sunrise was as beautiful as he remembered from the one time he visited the Grand Bahamas a few summers ago.

Early morning brought birds to the skies for an easy meal. Large pelicans skimmed over the glassy Atlantic Ocean in search for unsuspecting fish near the surface. Terns, sandpipers, and gulls patrolled the shoreline for bugs and crabs. Water lapping at the shore, the ocean breeze, and a few early morning birds stirring from their sleep in the forest were the only sounds around.
Sasuke sighed and took a step forward, letting his bare feet soak in the warm, salty water. The temperature was perfect for a swim and he was eager to get in the water.

Now fully awake, the brunette turned back to base camp for his camera equipment and snorkel gear. Suiting up, Sasuke double checked the battery life, lens and flash, and memory card before securing the expensive Nikon camera in a bulky waterproof case, then checked that for any loose seams or cracks. Checking all his equipment before a shoot came naturally to him after doing it for so many years.

Since it was his first day exploring the underwater ecosystem he opted out of using the full dive gear. Better to save on oxygen tanks when he wasn’t even sure what was out there. It didn’t take long at all before he was walking back to the sea in his lighter snorkel gear, his movements being rather awkward and sluggish with fins and camera equipment bogging him down, but it was a necessary evil. And one that he would gladly do a thousand times over.

The water visibility was perfect. He had checked the pH balance after dinner last night and the results were better than average. There were no signs of toxins in the sand either that suggested the island was dangerous. Whatever steered the sailors in the past was either long gone or it was the currents. All the better for him. Volcanic islands were a rare find in the Caribbean and would be flipped into a tourist destination if it were easier to approach. Without all the pollution that comes with native dwellers and cruise ships, the water remained clear and crystallized. As an added bonus the sky was open and cloudless, not a haze in sight.

Sunny weather made for ideal diving conditions. Only a dozen feet out and Sasuke already spotted at least seven different species of fish. Twenty feet out brought him to the first set of corals. They started out small and scattered however, the further Sasuke swam from shore the larger and more abundant the corals became. Within ten minutes he spotted common reef fish such as blue tangs, puffers, shepherds, butterflies, French and blue-striped grunts, angelfish, and trumpetfish left and right. Those fish were good signs of a healthy ecosystem and looked great in an aquarium, but Sasuke wasn’t looking for species he’s already taken hundreds of photos of. He could find all those off the Florida Keys. Rather he was looking for something unique and considerably more rare. With the abundant variety of corals around it shouldn’t be all that hard to find.

New species of fish were found every day. Proper documentation of them was not so common.

Everything went smoothly until the further he drifted from land. A sense of unease crawled under his skin as he approached the midsection of the cove—approximately a football field’s length from where he started. He felt eyes on him, watching him from a distance. The feeling of being stalked by an intelligent predator stuck to him like glue. But every time he looked around there was nothing dangerous in sight.

Knowing there was no help around if he ran into trouble, Sasuke kept all his senses on high alert. The only shark he saw was a harmless two foot sand shark and a larger nurse shark. Nothing to be wary of, but it still didn’t feel right. He treaded carefully.

Overtime the paranoia lessened when nothing lurking in the shadows came after him. His instincts were always on point, but after Jiraiya’s story he knew how easy superstition could manifest into full blown paranoia. Once he relaxed enough the diver was able to resume his job properly. However, the sense of being watched never really left the back of his mind…”

Tension evaporated when two overly curious and playful dolphins swam over to him. They were unusually nosy, coming up close and nuzzling his flippers or anything else they found interesting on his person. After a while they grew bored and went on their way.
Sasuke took advantage of the rare opportunity and got plenty of shots as they approached near the camera lens. Dolphin photos were always popular and sold quickly. Other than that, the day flew by. Hours felt like minutes as he photographed a hawksbill sea turtle, moray eels, spotted stingrays, sea horses, clown fish, and one very large grouper. Overall a great turnout, enough to pay for the majority of the trips expenses.

During the night the sense of being watched disappeared as he went through all the photos. When morning hit, Sasuke felt refreshed and had a better grasp of the environment he was working in. Leaving the snorkeling for another day, the brunette took out his scuba gear to venture deeper into the reef. Shortly after entering the water he felt those eyes on him again but he paid it no mind. He was here to do a job that required a steady hand and focus, worrying about what might be out there would do him no good. As he swam out to a deeper section, the same dolphins approached him again. Sasuke let them investigate for a little while before he continued on. If he wanted to pay for his rent for the next few months he’d need to capture something more unique.

However, the further he ventured from the safety of camp the stronger the mysterious presence became. The sense of being watched hit him full force, as though a great white was on his heels. Sucking it up, Sasuke braved it and took the plunge, frayed nerves and all.

It was worth it.

Submerged fifty feet below, the diver kept a close eye on the electronic wrist watch that gauged the depth and oxygen levels as he slowly descended below the surface. The water visibility remained clear and light rays were still able to easily penetrate though this depth, illuminating the schools of anchovies and blue tags. Black wings of a massive 18 foot manta ray gracefully glided past him like a kite soaring through the sky. In all his years of professional diving, Sasuke has only encountered the illusive species a couple times, and never one this big. The shutter of the Nikon d810 went off in rapid succession as he captured the rare and illusive creature with his camera. Seconds later the magnificent beast was gone, flying through the water with little effort. Excitement coursed through Sasuke veins, washing away the unease he felt earlier. He continued investigating the flourishing ecosystem with renewed vigor.

Without noticing it before, Sasuke noted the lack of debris in the water. Actually, from what he’d seen of the island thus far has been surprisingly clean.

Typically outside of any tourist trap, storm debris and human garbage would litter the beaches, but not here. There were hardly any contaminants around. The ocean and beach was cleaner than he’s ever seen before. Just the occasional parts from old shipwrecks that now served as shelter for fish. If Sasuke didn’t know any better he’d think someone were picking up around the place. Which was impossible…considering the nearest civilization was several hundreds of miles away.

Either way it worked in his favor.

A plethora of vibrant fish ranging from common to rare flourished in these conditions. Some species even wore a different color pattern that he wasn’t familiar with, meaning they were very likely to be a newly discovered subspecies of fish. He took photos of them all, and also of a rare Caribbean clown snapper. That was a victory in and of itself.

Sasuke could’ve easily called it a day and spend some leisurely time on the beach or exploring the island further, yet he continued on and was pleased with the results, excited by the prospect of finding something else. Luck was on his side as he spotted parrot fish, sawfish, an electric ray, strange looking frog fish, several different species of stingrays, and the ever invasive lion fish.

Pleased with the results, Sasuke headed back to base camp and spoiled himself by making fresh fish
tacos for dinner, ignoring the feeling of eyes on his back the entire time.

By the fourth day Sasuke found a freshly caught snapper perched on a smooth rock nearest his camp. It had been placed meticulously on the flat surface, as though it were an offering. Before he picked it up, Sasuke inspected the fish closely for signs of disease or rot, eventually determining it was safe to eat for breakfast. The taste of fresh seafood last night left him salivating for more. It’s been a while since he’s had anything that fresh to eat, and over seven hours of swimming meant he needed to eat more than the feeble rations he brought along.

Sasuke’s belly grumbled just thinking how much better a hot meal would be over a granola bar. Deciding to go for it, the man expertly prepared the fish, roasting it over the travel-sized butane cooker he brought along with him for this occasion. Adding the island’s fresh coconut and mango, plus left over rice from yesterday lunch, Sasuke enjoyed himself a filling and delicious breakfast.

The next couple days continued on like that. He’d wake up and there would be a freshly caught fish on the same rock. He probably should’ve put more thought into the mysterious event but he was always too hungry and grateful by morning to really care. The most dangerous part about it was that Sasuke was actually starting to rely on this small miracle. Dependency in the wild didn’t take long to develop.

Even though Sasuke’s been on the island for a few days now, the tingly feeling of being watched still lingered in the back of his mind every time he went in the water. However, the threat was less pressing as he had yet to find anything menacing to be wary of. And there were the curious dolphins. It was always a reassuring sign to have dolphins nearby, especially ones that appeared to be looking out for him. So Sasuke encouraged their behavior by feeding them leftover fish scraps from his breakfast in hopes of keeping them around a little longer.

On the fourth day Sasuke had a clear mental picture of the eastern side of the islands reef layout, where the hard to reach places were located, and timestamps of peak activity among the fishes. He even found where stingrays and reef sharks liked to feed. During lulls of activity he’d go eat lunch or sit under the shade and look through the images he took, seeking out imperfections for future improvement or retakes.

Underwater photography was one of the hardest in its field with the questionable environmental conditions and lighting. Most pictures would come out blurry or too dark to salvage—even if he used Photoshop. Once he picked out his mistakes he’d go back to try again, this time focusing on ways to improve the shot. Although, most of it was just sheer luck and all about the right timing. Patience was always key.

By the fifth day Sasuke was feeling confident enough to venture into the deepest section of the reef. Being so far from shore in current rich waters placed him at a serious disadvantage if anything were to go wrong—A risk he wouldn’t normally take without the safety of a spotter (dive partner). On the other hand, this entire trip had been a huge risk. If he wasn’t willing to take another one, all this would be for naught. His dreams of being an oceanographer would be sealed away forever.

Bracing himself, the brunette opened up the oxygen valve then dove 90ft below, where the visibility diminished slightly under the fading light. Yet the Caribbean Sea was clear enough to easy see the trail of blooming corals and schooling fish under these depths.

He swam along the edge of a huge drop-off, where nothing but vast open seas awaited, sandy bottoms and dark cold temperatures. It was eerie and serene at the same time. On one side, there was an abundant array of sea life, while the other side was like looking into space. And in that empty space was intimidating barracuda staring him down, watching Sasuke’s every move while hovering completely still, reminding the man that he was not the top of the food chain in the ocean.
A flash of shiny yellow caught his peripheral, snagging his attention as he neared a large coral structure dotted with countless holes, perfect for housing a variety of species. Twisting his body around, Sasuke’s fin accidentally scraped over one of the holes and before he knew it, his face mask was shrouded in inky darkness. Tentacles latched securely around his mask, wrapping around his entire head like a backward helmet.

All of a sudden Sasuke was thrown into a diver’s nightmare.

Struggling to pry the octopus off, the squishy body and strong tentacles made the task difficult. Every time Sasuke managed to get one tentacle off another would replace. Panic didn’t really set in until the damn octopus punctured the breathing hose and he inhaled a lung full of water.

Nearly one hundred feet below the surface was a terrible place to be without oxygen.

Heart was beating erratically in his chest, time slowed down as he coughed up the salty water flooding his organ. Seconds past that felt like minutes before his vision dimmed completely, and there was harsh, jerking tug on his head. Briefly Sasuke felt human hands on him, then it was lights out as his body floated listlessly in the water…

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will start out skimming through Naruto's and Sasuke's first encounter and get back to the present. You’ll get to finally see what happens after they traded names. Much cuteness awaits! :D

The holiday break put me behind a bit. Once I complete updates for my other two stories, the updates on this story will become more frequent again.
Second Chance

Chapter Notes

Yeah, yeah. I’m still alive and here. Sorry for taking so long with the updates, I haven’t really been in the writing mood most this year so it’s a struggle to get much done when I so sit down and finally type. But I will keep updating, just not such how frequent or reliable my personal update goal deadlines will be. So, sorry about that. I hope you guy’s enjoy. I can tell there has been a shift in my writing style since I did the vampire fic so you might notice a difference. :) 

It burned. Everything felt on fire. But he wasn’t dead…Or at least he didn’t think so.

Small hands tugged at his body. Sasuke didn’t know who had come to rescue him, only that somebody miraculously did and just in the nick of time. It shouldn’t be possible. He knew that. He was the only one on this cursed island, after all. If only he could open his eyes—

Shit!

It burned. So fucking bad.

In the warm waters of the Caribbean, his body convulsed as it expelled salt water from his lungs and stomach. At least the horrid retching ended before he suffocated to death. Salt water expelled from his lungs through his mouth. Only then was he able to gasp in much needed oxygen.

Fuck it hurt.

His chest and throat felt like he ingested hot coal. Spots of light filtered in his vision, yet he still couldn’t make out any shapes. It was all a blur of muddled colors and non-distinguished shapes. Coughing a few more times, Sasuke finally managed to clear out the remaining water from his lungs. His breathing slowed to a manageable pace and his vision sharpened into focus once again, as though it were a camera lens. He almost wished it hadn’t. The person who’d rescued him was a boy…no…ah—a creature.

Flashing blue eyes, sharp pointy teeth bared and stained red with octopus blood was the first thing Sasuke noticed after he regained consciousness. In his near death experience, the brunette almost overlooked the young blond’s otherworldly features and sharp teeth until he caught a glimpse of the boy’s fiery orange and red scaly tale that lied just beneath the crystal surface.

Shocked and stunned in disbelief, Sasuke’s arms flailed noisily above the surface, splashing at the water as though he were a drowning victim rather than the pro diver he was. His legs kicked out automatically, which unknowingly kept him above water and allowed the merman to release his hold on him.

Once Sasuke finally pieced together that he was face to face with a merman he reeled back in fear and made for the safety of the shores, but not before the humanlike creature flared out his impressive fins like a poisonous lion fish and bellowed. The piercing noise the Siren created was unlike anything
he’s ever heard before. Loud enough to create a supersonic pulse through the water that knocked the precious air out of his lungs, which in turn provided him with a boost he needed to swim away. And swim he did. Fast enough to break his personal best in an attempt to free himself from the mythical beast of the sea.

Sasuke had no idea how fast a merman could swim, nor did he dare to look back and see if the creature was following him or not. At some point he found himself back in the safety of his camp, shivering and out of breath, heart racing a million miles a minute. When he finally got the nerve to look back at the ocean there was no signs of the human-fish hybrid, but he knew it was there. Or so he hoped.

It wouldn’t do him any good to lose his mind on a desolate island. On the other hand, it wouldn’t do him any good to share the cove with a legendary man-eating creature either.

Taking in a deep breath, Sasuke slumped back in his hammock, exhausted and mentally drained.

God, he felt like he was losing his mind already just thinking about it. The boy was real, not a figment of his imagination, no matter how much he wished it were. There was no denying it. Not with that tail and other aquatic features visibly present on his face.

The question was, how was he going to deal with this? Should he abort the mission and call up Jiraiya? Cash in while he could even though it would only cover the funds for the trip and maybe a month or two of rent. Or should he play it out and see if the merman leaves after a few days?

The remainder of the day was spent re-evaluating the event over and over again in his mind. At times he felt like he was going crazy. The possibly of hallucination from the lack of oxygen and a near death experience was pretty damn reasonable. And yet, the more he thought about it, the more realistic it became. Someone had to rescue him from that octopus. Sasuke clearly remembered the firm grip of hands on him…and when he factored in Jiraiya’s story, the cleanliness of the beach and water, the mysterious dead fish that kept showing up on a rock, and the ever present sense of being watched…

Jesus Fucking Christ.

There really was a fucking merman living at this island.

The following couple days flew by like a hazy dream. Sasuke spent most of the time exploring the island while he debated on what to do next. He was hesitant to call up Jiraiya for an early evac. Pride being the main reason why.

For months Sasuke saved up for this opportunity and in many ways his livelihood depended on it, and he wasn’t willing to let a boy with a fish tale scare him off the island—No matter how intimidating going back into the water was for him. But for now, getting to know his surroundings wasn’t such a bad move at the moment. Then we could gather his thoughts (and nerves) and figure out a plan of action.

Upon his search of the island, Sasuke was rewarded with an abundance of fresh fruits and a clean water source from a local spring not far from camp. That was great and all, however, every day that past his desire to return to the sea beckoned him like a sirens call. Ironic since that was a very real possibility now. And by the third day he felt as though there was an invisibly itch constantly on his back, begging him to return to the open sea.
Ignoring his internal battle, Sasuke avoided the shoreline altogether. Avoided looking out into the glistening horizon as the sun set and rose each morning. Avoided looking for the mysterious fish-boy who had saved his life. Avoided looking at the special rock that he found a fresh fish on almost every day since arriving on the island.

*Did it come from the boy?*

It had to be. No one else was on the island and other mammals’ were not known for such behavior.

*Fuck*

The more time that past the more his curiosity peaked for the creature and his fear lessened, and more questions popped in his head.

*Why did the merman bring him food?*

*Why did he save him from the octopus?*

These questions and many more whirled around Sasuke’s mind as he bathed under a small waterfall at the spring. This island was truly spectacular in its own right. In many ways he was glad no humans managed to conquer it, bending it to their will and tainting the landscape with pollution and deforestation, turning a lush forest with nutrient rich soil into a barren wasteland covered in pavement, fast food chains, and tourist shops. If sirens really were the reasoning for that…well then, he was fucking thankful for it. This island deserved protecting.

The real question was now: how would the merman react to his presence, now that they were both well aware of each other’s presence? The creature made it pretty damn clear to him that he wasn’t welcomed on his turf from that encounter. But was Sasuke really going to let a boy—be it a terrifying fish hybrid boy—keep him away from reaching his goals? Fuck no. He was no pushover. Years of military experience gave him that much, for fuck’s sake—The Navy, no less. Sharks, alligators, snakes, and other poisonous fish and plants have never stopped him before. Why should a blond hair teen with big blue eyes, sharp teeth and a tail be any different?

He sighed.

Lathering up ecofriendly shampoo in his hair, Sasuke caught a flash of movement out of his peripheral. Immediately his muscles tensed. Memories of golden-yellow scales flashed though his mind. Memories of what he remembered before the octopus attacked.

On edge now, Sasuke continued washing as if he never noticed in the first place. He kept his movements subtle and natural, keeping a relaxed posture as he shifted for a better view. Once the suds rinsed away from his eyes he caught the sight of the merman observing him behind a boulder. The blond was just…staring at him, as though mesmerized by the sight of him.

Sasuke smirked.

This wasn’t the first time he’d been ogled before, and surely it wouldn’t be the last, but it was definitely a new experience to have a mythical creature doing so.

Instead of making his awareness known, Sasuke continued to bathe as though he didn’t have an audience, letting the power of the falls to wash away any remaining suds. He watched the boy intently as he got to work lathering up his body with soap. For some reason it didn’t bother him at all to have the Siren watching him when he was exposed and vulnerable. There was nothing aggressive
or hungry about the way the boy was looking at him, only childish curiosity. Innocent and pure. That’s what Sasuke saw when he looked deep into those magnetic blue eyes. Eyes that followed his every movement in awe.

In a way he found this behavior kinda cute and endearing. On the other hand, it was slightly unnerving to witness an intelligent, non-human species observe him with keen interest. This must be what it would feel like coming face to face with an alien species from another planet.

Actual, this exactly what it would be like.

Shit

His flinch alerted the creature. For a brief moment their eyes locked before fish-boy did a back flip and disappeared beneath the surface. Sasuke released a breath that he didn’t know he held.

Dammit. He was not expecting to see the curious merman in a spring out of all places. How the fuck did he get in here anyway? The spring was located a good kilometer inland, and while it was possible that there were underground channels connecting land to sea there was still the fact that most fish could not adapt to such a drastic change of salinity in the water. Transitioning from salt to fresh water would kill most fish.

What he thought to be a peaceful afternoon turned into a plethora of more unanswered questions. The creature was an enigma in its own right. A legend, myth. Yet, there was more to it than that. Were there any others of his kind? So far he’s only seen the young merman alone. At this point it was pretty obvious the boy wasn’t there to hunt him, so what did he want? The blond seemed genuinely curious about his appearance on the island—Not to mention the fact that he saved his life and supplied him with food…

There’d been many opportunities for the merman to take him out, but he never did. Horror stories that plagued this legendary creature did not match up to his experience with him. Man-eater did not seem very likely at all, or at least with this particular Siren.

No, this boy seemed genuinely interested in him. Inquisitive and sharp minded. Bold yet timid. Sasuke found himself wanting to learn more—craving it even. He just wasn’t sure if said creature would welcome him back in open waters…

After a long, restless night Sasuke decided to investigate the shoreline once again, albeit more cautiously this time. He was well aware the Siren boy had many opportunities to harm him if desired, yet he only witnesses common traits that any curious, timid animals would display under the circumstances.

With the exception of their first face to face encounter, there was no outward hostility coming from the merman. And the more he thought about it, the more likely it became the blond was simply defending himself, like a scared cat fluffing out its fur to appear larger when threatened. Sasuke couldn’t judge him from that alone. He needed more than that to believe the horror stories of Sirens. It was simply unimaginable picturing the ethereal boy tearing into human flesh. So he decided to stay on the island until he learned more of the fish-boys intentions, but mostly it was out of sheer curiosity and astonishment that kept him here.

Stupid or not, it wasn’t every day he encountered the Big Foot of the ocean. Who was he to run from the impossible?
Warm salt water lapped at Sasuke’s feet as he strolled across the sandy white beach. The gentle sea breeze blowing his long, stylish bangs away from his face, displaying his high cheekbones, strong nose line, and slender chin for all the world to see. Luckily for him there were no eyes on the island to admire or criticize his masculine beauty.

Just the way he preferred it.

People were always quick to judge him by appearance alone. It always made him feel like a con, a pretty package hiding a tainted soul within. Somedays he wished the scars he held were visible from the outside and not within…

If anyone cared enough to see past his genetically proportionate features then they would walk away, or at least that’s what Sakura did. Now he preferred no one look at him. That’s when he saw it.

Nearly lost deep in thought, Sasuke spotted a glimmer of gold sitting on top of the rock that previously held fish for him since his arrival on the island. Upon closer inspection, the flashy object appeared to be a small jewelry box of sorts. The man made artifact had him questioning the islands inhabitants for a brief moment before realizing the merman must’ve placed it there.

But why? Was it a gift? A peace treaty of sorts?

If so, then Siren held a much higher level of intelligence than he originally anticipated. Intelligent enough to potentially organize an entire civilization under the sea. Was there a colony of human-fish hybrids living beneath the waves? Hard to believe something like that could escape from human detection in this day of age.

Chills crawled up his spine just thinking about it. He’d have to patrol the coastline for more signs and spotting of these creatures before venturing back in. It was one thing to be dealing with a single young, harmless looking boy, and another to be dealing with a whole swarm of them.

Thankfully that didn’t seem to be the case. As Sasuke scoured the coastline searching for evidence to support these claims, he came up with nothing. There were no signs to suggest the reef held multiple —if not hundreds—of these creatures, and he knew he wouldn’t find anything underwater either. There was two likely options: Either Sirens were a solitary species, or they were faced with near extinction. Unfortunately the second option seemed more likely, taking into account the damage the ocean and its marine inhabitants have undergone the last few decades.

The question now was: how long has the young merman been living here? And…is he the last one remaining?

Erring on the side of caution, he spent a few more days closely observing the cove for signs of more Sirens before deciding it was safe to reenter the water. A new offering greeted him on the special rock with every passing day. Much to his surprise the blond was very generous, gifting him with valuable items along with the catch of the day. The jewelry box he received the first day was indeed made of solid gold, decorated with precious gems on the sides. If he had to guess, the box most likely derived from the Victorian era. At an auction house or antique gallery it would sell for a pretty penny.

By the third day a string of pearls was his gift. That’s when Sasuke decided to return the offering by placing a few lucky gold coins on the rock. The boy seemed to have an inclination to shiny objects so he thought that would make an appropriate gift. It came as no surprise to find them missing after breakfast. A feeling of achievement washed over him through the unspoken alliance that was formed.
Feeling confident about the turn of events, Sasuke ventured into the open waters. His heart might’ve been beating faster than normal, yet he retained a calmness about him throughout the dive. Sure, it was his first time going venturing back in the water after that first encounter, but it didn’t take very long to find his groove. Diving was simply his favorite activity.

Within minutes his muscles loosened up in the zero gravity environment, placated into a natural state of relaxation. Because let’s face it, it was damn near impossible to remain uptight when he was working in such a marvelous environment. A healthy coral reef system was unlike any other place on earth. He was just grateful to have the opportunity of capturing the alien beauty of the reef before any permanent damage has been done. Like coral bleaching.

It didn’t take long at all to feel the familiar presence of eyes on him. Now that he knew what creature it belonged to it was almost comforting. After all, the merman did save him from the octopus. There was no feeling of threat so he resumed his duties as per usual, photographing fish and anything else that caught his eye, while in the back of his mind he secretly fantasized about capturing the timid merman on film. Not to sell or show anyone else of course, but to keep for his own private collection—if only to prove his sanity to himself on the days he questioned it. Sending a photograph of a merman to a publisher would discredit him completely as a photographer, as the industry would believe it to be a mix of cosplay and Photoshop.

To be honest, Sasuke never thought the illusive fish-boy would make an appearance so soon, or even at all. But he was in luck as brilliant golden-yellow scales with a flare of fiery red snared his attention in the distance. He’d been so caught up in his own thoughts that he almost missed it…when in reality, the creature from his daydream was quite close. Close enough that he flinched.

The Siren halted his advance, catching the sudden tension in Sasuke’s movement. The merman shifted angles to form large circles around Sasuke instead of advancing directly towards him, all the while keeping those piercing blue eyes locked on him the entire time.

Typically Sasuke would find this behavior somewhat unnerving, like a shark circling its prey looking for an opening or any signs of weakness, but there was something different about the way the boy swam, relaxed and posed. Calm and alluring. Sasuke was awestruck. He’d never seen anything so beautiful yet more terrifying in his life. Every scale on the merman’s body glowed more vividly than the brightest fish in the dancing lights rays. He wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or bad—nature often had a way of making the most brilliant colored animals the most deadly, and yet, he found himself uncaring either way. If the merman truly wished him harm there was more proficient ways of doing so without all the enchantment and hypnotic grace.

So he watched.

Closer and closer the mythical being closed the distance until he was nearly within reach. Sasuke paddled listlessly above the reef bed as he awaited the blond’s next move. He wasn’t sure what the merman wanted or why he came this close to him in the first place, but it was obvious he peaked the creature’s curiosity just as much as the boy peaked his.

However, once the merman drew closer his placid features transformed into one of agitation. Fear shot up Sasuke’s spine when the boy made a move for his mask. It was so fast. The merman’s superior speed underwater took him by surprise. There was nothing he could do to stop the merman from yanking off his mask. Sasuke immediately headed for the surface, questioning his own intelligence all the way up.

Jesus. What a stupid idea it was to let an unknown creature like that get so close to him. But then he remembered that the boy went after his mask before too. It was entirely possible the merman assumed it was hindering his performance underwater in some way, or even affecting his breathing.
Once he gathered up his nerves again, Sasuke did the brave thing and signaled for the blond to come up.

The merman didn’t disappoint.

While Sasuke knew the creature had remarkable intellect, it never ceased to amaze him just how much the boy had, borderline rivaling that in homosapien’s. If his old friend, Shikamaru, got hold of the blond he would seriously have a field day with all the research potential a new species presented. The thought brought a smirk to Sasuke’s lips as the merman made his way up. As funny as it was, he would never betray the blond’s trust and safety by doing such a thing.

Sasuke treaded water, apprehensively awaiting a blond head to pop beside him. For the first time in years he felt almost giddy with nervous energy, a remarkable fleet for someone like him to experience. Seconds later the calm ocean water churned in front of him, and sure enough the young merman breached the surface. It became obvious to him the creature was out of his element by the way he struggled to breath in the surface air. Sasuke couldn’t help himself from releasing a throaty chuckle. Seeing the merman like this, it was now hard to recall why he’d been so terrified of the boy in their first encounter. The blond was actually…kinda cute, especially when he looked so perturbed by his laugh.

The human alikeness in his features dropped Sasuke’s guard for a moment. He reached out to touch the merman without thought. A mistake he soon came to regret. The blond startled, biting his finger with razor sharp teeth and tearing through flesh like butter.

Teeth that definitely did not belong to a human.

Sure it hurt. However, the real pain came from the Siren’s cry. With a single screech Sasuke felt as though his eardrums would burst. Never again would he mistake this boy as a human again. The merman truly lived up to their legend of Siren’s having a strong set of vocals. Understatement.

But…these creatures were not meant to be real. Sirens were folklore, or so he was led to believe until recently. Yet, here he was. Face to face with the mythical beast of the sea, trying to befriend said creature.

Shit. Maybe he really did lose his mind.

But instead of freaking out and doubting himself, he did the next dumbest thing that came to mind and tried communicating with it. Obviously the creature did not know English, but his voice seemed to calm the merman as his jerky moments stopped and his ears perked forward.

Knowing he had the merman’s undivided attention—without the negative energy, Sasuke pointed to himself then pronounced his name. After a few more tries the merman seemed to understand the direction of the one-sided conversation and made an attempt to speak for himself. A high pitched squealing sound was what he got for his efforts. Sasuke cringed and covered his ears, the Siren was truly something else. Something very far from human.

It was a good thing the blond seemed to grasp his discomfort and adjusted his vocals to something more human sounding. His determination to adjust pitch was admirable and remarkable at the same time. Sasuke did not expect the merman to mimic his human speech, but eventually the blond did. And what he got next out of the merman was something he’d never expected to see…to hear… in a million year.

The Siren matched Sasuke’s pitch perfectly as he exclaimed a single word.
Naruto… was the merman’s name.

And if Sasuke wasn’t already 100% sure of it, then merman repeated the word back to him over and over again until Sasuke confirmed that was indeed the blond’s name.

Pure joy and excitement radiated from ‘Naruto’ like a beacon of light when Sasuke repeated the name back to him. The blond’s exuberant behavior was contagious enough that Sasuke overlooked the fact that he was communicating with a merman on a deserted, tropical island.

He could freak out about that mental image later.

Right now, there was nothing more important in his life than hearing the merman repeat Sasuke’s name back to him—in his own voice. Sasuke damn near lost it. The breakthrough was too much to process while treading water. He swam to the shallows where he could feel more at home standing on the sandy bottom and collect himself. There was no need to turn back and see if the merman followed him or not. He could feel it.

Once he reach an area where he could touch ground, Sasuke stood to full height then turned to face the merman, unintentionally scaring Naruto with his sudden size and height difference.

“Shit, shit. I’m sorry Naruto!” he apologized, immediately recognizing the mistake he had made. He quickly sank back down to the Sirens level “I didn’t mean to scare you. Fuck…this is crazy.”

He groaned out in frustration. Dealing with a flighty new species that didn’t understand a word of English was not an easy undertaking. Naruto was obviously on edge and showing clear signs of agitation. He needed to play this smart.

Calming his features, Sasuke slowly reached out his hand towards the blond, pausing just before he breached the blond’s personal bubble. He wasn’t going to be repeating that mistake again.

After a moment of hesitation, the fish-boy sniffed Sasuke’s hand before touching it with his own clawed fingertips. He watched Naruto’s movements closely, observing the subtle differences between them.

Naruto appeared to be half human/half fish, but that wasn’t exactly the case. He was far more aquatic in design than Sasuke anticipated. With skin that was cool to the touch, Naruto’s fingers were connected by webbed skin and his ‘skin’ felt unnaturally smooth to the touch. Even though half of Naruto’s body appeared to be made of human skin, it was far from the truth. Tiny scales covered him from head to tail. Softer to the touch and more malleable than any human skin could ever be. Sasuke traced up the blond’s arm once he thought the merman wouldn’t fright away, pausing at his upper arm.

“Are we good, Naruto?” He nodded to the merman, looking directly into his sapphire blue eyes.

Naruto tilted his head in concentration.

“Sasuke. Good.”

Those two simple words sealed their fate.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!