The Lost Child

by everyonehasproblems

Summary

When the council decides that Naruto has become too powerful to control, Naruto is forced to abandon the village and people he loves and has fought for. Four years later a stranger is invited to Konoha.
Naruto watched as the sky lightened. It was a beautiful blend of reds and purples. The darkness of the night faded away, leaving hope for a new day, a new start. It was a fitting end for his time in Konoha.

The Council Elders tried to make his leave in the middle of the night but Baa-chan had put her foot down and told them he would get one day, one full day, to say goodbye. Baa-chan couldn't do anything about their ruling, not with Jiraiya off on a suicide mission, Kakashi off on an ANBU mission and Sakura with her new Genin Team.

Naruto sighed and watched the village wake up slowly. He knew this day would come at some point. There was no way they would forgive him for forcibly bringing back the Uchiha Heir in critical condition. It had only taken him five years. The Council Elders thought it was a suitable punishment.

Sakura and Kakashi hadn't even been informed that Naruto had brought back Sasuke. He didn't want them to know what he had to do to get him back. Sasuke would survive; that he was sure of. It was the fact he did it without anyone knowing that was the problem. The fact he had gotten help from the missing Uchiha’s S-Class Missing-Nin brother just made it worst.

It was only because of Itachi that Naruto was even able to knock Sasuke unconscious; that snake bastard had his claws in Sasuke really good. Itachi had gotten rid of the Curse Seal; how, Naruto didn't know nor did he really care. All that mattered was that Sasuke was free of his influence. Sasuke had reacted badly though, using the rest of his chakra to try and obliterate Naruto and Itachi. Itachi had stopped him then explained the truth of what he did all those years ago. Sasuke had promptly passed out and Naruto had been left with two barely alive Uchihas seeing as Itachi had neglected to tell anyone that he was sick.

Naruto had walked in the gates of Konoha carrying two very injured people who many thought of as Princes. Baa-chan had been notified then Naruto had been thrown in Jail. The Council Elders had ruled Naruto to be unstable and unsuitable for life as a Konoha Nin. They had originally wanted to execute him until Baa-chan had overruled with an equal punishment of banishment. It was all she could do to save Naruto’s life.

Baa-chan told him to get as far away from Konoha as he could; “Don't stop running until you're a month out of Konoha” she warned him. No doubt assassins would be after him sooner rather than later.

Naruto watched as the village came alive. People seemed happier today; they were smiling instead of scowling; they were greeting each other with words not nods. Somehow they knew the “Demon Child” wouldn't be among them anymore. Naruto knew when, not if, Jiraiya came back, someone would have to stop him from slaughtering the villagers. When Kakashi came back, the Council Elders might find themselves down a head or two. Naruto knew Sakura would be overjoyed about having Sasuke back; it would probably just slip her mind that Naruto was no longer there.

The others of Konoha 12 would probably be indifferent, at the most sad for a minute then relieved. Even Hinata had grown out of her crush and gone after Kiba. There was no one besides Iruka, and
maybe Baa-chan, that would shed open tears. Naruto didn't want to even imagine how Sasuke and Itachi would react. Itachi was no doubt be pissed that he didn't die. He had told Naruto to leave him lying there. Of course Naruto had taken him home; he wasn't really a Missing-nin anyways.

Naruto watched as villagers started towards the hospital, each carrying baskets full of food and gifts. Of course they would favor the traitor and murder.

_Kit, stop sulking. Get moving. The old hag bought you 24 hours that you don't seem to be using. The sooner we leave, the safer we'll be._

_Really, Kurama? Because I think the moment we leave, we're as good as dead._ Naruto responded. He watched as the ANBU Guards tried and failed to keep the civilians out of the hospital.

_Kit…we'll survive. I promise you that. We did not go through 17 years of hell so that they could turn around and kick you out for something you did for them._

Naruto smiled gently. “I…I guess you're right Kurama. I have to say goodbye to Iruka. Should we let the villagers burn down my apartment?” Naruto got up and started down the Fourth Hokage’s head at an unhurried pace. He had until sundown but he would be gone long before that.

_Kuku…sure. And leave behind a little Genjutsu while you're at it. Are you going to tell the old hag to tell the others why you were banished?_

Naruto shrugged and kept walking. “Maybe I should. That way, anyone who cares will know why I'm leaving. Hell, they'll know why people always hated me finally.” Naruto mused out loud, no longer caring what others heard or thought. He only had a few hours left anyways.

After that, he was free to do what he wanted. Kurama would help.
Four Years Later

“What do you mean they're all gone!” Sasuke shouted at Tsunade.

Tsunade sighed but didn't tell him to simmer down. He had been this way since Naruto left four years ago. He had woke up expecting a loudmouth idiot begging for a spar and instead found all of the Konoha 12 plus Sai, Itachi, Iruka, Kakashi, Jiraiya, Gai, Asuma, Kurenai and Tsunade acting like someone had died. He had scowled and automatically asked where Dobe was. Sakura and Ino had burst into tears while Hinata clung to Kiba. Shikamaru had been wide awake and leaning on Choji, barely supporting himself. Sai and Shino were silent but gave off an air of sadness and regret. Neji, Tenten and Lee were all standing by Gai, trying to kept him from attacking someone. Kakashi was holding a very distressed Iruka. Asuma, Kurenai, and Jiraiya were just standing there.

Itachi was blank faced but Sasuke could read the tenseness in his shoulders. Tsunade…was old. For the first time since he had saw her, she was old and tired.

When he heard the story and what the Council Elders had done to Naruto, Sasuke had changed from uncaring to loud and brash, always trying to get the Council Elders to change their minds about Naruto. He had even gotten Itachi to be slightly less unemotional.

Tsunade sighed again and looked directly into Sasuke’s Sharingan. It had stopped scaring her the moment she saw him cry for the loss of his best friend. “The entire Akatsuki has been wiped out by an unidentified person.”

Sasuke glared by closed his eyes. When they reopened, turbulent black eyes stared back into brown ones. “So why were we called in?”

The “we” he was talking about was the old teams 7 and 10. Neji and Lee were also there standing in the background. Neji had learned to disappear after his ANBU training about a year after Naruto left. He had become the best ANBU assassin since Kakashi. Kakashi and Asuma were also there. Kakashi had decided not to take another Genin team as did Asuma. They both went back on active Jonin status once all their Genin become Jonin themselves.

Tsunade sighed and looked at an empty sake bottle. She had stopped drinking the day Naruto had been kicked out. He had never approved. Now she kept empty bottles to keep up appearances but everyone close to her knew she had stopped a long time ago. “I called you all here because the Council has decided to recruit the person who single handedly annihilated the Akatsuki. He was last seen in Otogakure. There are reports that he destroyed the last of Orochimaru’s strongholds there.”

Sasuke scowled but nodded. At first, everyone had hoped it was Naruto but then reports started to come back of a masked figure using all elemental Jutsu and no sighting of Naruto anywhere after the first year. Then, about two years ago, a Konoha headband had been sent to Tsunade with a note. While no one had ever read the note except Tsunade, something about it had changed her attitude towards finding Naruto.

“Fine!” Sasuke bit out. He turned and stomped out of the room, pissed off. Who cares about some mystery nin when Naruto was still out there?!

Tsunade sighed and dismissed the others. They left without any complaints. Tsunade turned and looked out over the village. It had been…boring since Naruto had left. Nothing exciting ever
happened. Tsunade turned towards her desk and opened in her drawer. Inside were some of her most precious items.

The First Hokage’s necklace. Naruto’s goggles from Konohamaru. A stuffed fox Naruto sent a year into his banishment. Naruto’s headband, all scratched and well used. And the last communication she had ever gotten from him. Tsunade bit her lip to keep the tears from falling.

She slowly unfolded the note, well creased from opening and closing it so many times.

_Baa-chan,_

_How are you? Stupid question I know but still, I would like to think you’re still a bitter old hag I left. I heard about Sasuke’s recent outburst on the Council. Is it true Itachi had to knock him out? Hehe, that stupid Teme._

_Anyways, that's not what I wanted to talk about. I wanted to say goodbye. This will be my final note to you._

_Don't blame yourself and I'm not dying either! Have some faith in me!_  

_I just…need to move on. Kurama has been riding me about my mindscape falling apart. He's complaining about rain and clouds and how it's turning back into a sewer._

_So I've decided to move on. Maybe one day I'll drop back by Konoha. Maybe you'll receive something as a surprise from my travels._

_Don't worry Baa-chan. I'm finally free. I'm going to travel for awhile and see what I find. I've already figured out not to go to Iwa… Thanks for telling me! Not! I knew my parents were awesome!_  

_Bye, Baa-chan. And thank you for saving me. I might not be in Konoha anymore but I'm alive and well. And please, stop looking for me. I won't come back now, not after getting a taste of true freedom._

_It's your choice what you tell the others. Just make sure they know I don't blame any of them._

_Be a good Hokage and find someone to give that necklace too! And it better be someone good! I won't have Konoha falling into despair just because I'm gone!_  

_Love,_

_Namikaze-Uzumaki Naruto_

Teardrops fell on the edge of the paper. She had decided not to tell anyone what Naruto did. She wanted him to be at peace. After he had broken the Toad Contract Jiraiya had decided to stay full time in the village. He had probably figured it out.

The others had accepted it after the first year he was gone. There was no use trying to convince someone to come back when they didn’t want too. Sure, Naruto had gotten her to come back but that was because he was Naruto.
Tsunade folded the note up and placed it back in the drawer. She smiled slightly. She hoped he was happy. Now that the Akatsuki were gone, Naruto was actually safe.

The group moved silently through the trees. For a large group, they were silent and very deadly. Surprisingly, all of Konoha 12 plus the old senseis had decided to join them on this mission. They were all curious as to who this mystery person was. Tsunade had sighed but let them go. She had Jiraiya to look after, after all.

Sasuke and Itachi were in front. The others fell in line with Kakashi and Asuma taking the rear.

They had been running for a few hours already. They were about half way to Otogakure when Itachi stopped and motioned for the others too also. He activated his Sharingan.

“I know you're there.” Itachi said.

There was a sigh to the right of them and a figure appeared on a nearby tree branch. Everyone tensed. How long has he been following them?!

The figure stood up. He was short and slim. A handle of a katana could be seen over his left shoulder. His face was hidden by a black hood and so was the majority of his body. He moved his hand and Sasuke spotted an intricate tattoo winding around his left hand and up into his sleeve.

“Yes?” The stranger asked. His voice was soothing and soft.

Kakashi took over when it became apparent that Itachi was done speaking. “We're from Konoha. We are on our way to find the man responsible for taking down the Akatsuki and tell him that the Hokage wanted to speak with him.”

The hooded figure seemed to tilt his head slightly. “Tsunade?”

Kakashi nodded. “Yes. Do you, by chance, know where he is?”

The figure nodded slightly. “It seems you have achieved your objective. I am the person who stopped the Akatsuki.”

Kakashi looked him over carefully. “Really?”

The figure nodded slightly then let out a brief chuckle. “May I ask why the Konoha 12 came out to find me? I cannot possibly be that important.”

Kakashi chuckled with him. It was tense and fake. “We wanted to give you a warm welcome.”

The figure hummed before nodded. “I see…will I be welcomed by all of Konoha? Or just some of Konoha?”

Kakashi paused and thought about. “Some, not all. Will you come?”

The figure shrugged. “As long as I'm not arrested or blamed for things I didn't do, I see no problem in stopping by. The Hokage did request me after all.”

Kakashi eye smiled at him. “Good! Now, what is your name? That way we can properly be introduced.”

The figure froze. “I do not have one.”
Kakashi winced. “Oh…umm…”

“But…you may call me Maigo for now. That's what my partner calls me sometimes.” The figure continued.

Kakashi stared at him. “Partner? Are they with you now?”

The figure laughed slightly. “No. And no, they did not help me with the Akatsuki. He disagreed with me and refused to help.”

Kakashi sighed but accepted it. If his theory was right, the man in front of him was alone. Any partner he had would also enjoy being alone. “Then can we start back now? The Hokage wanted to meet you immediately.”

Maigo nodded. “Yes, we can. Where would you like me to be? I know you would not enjoy me at your back.”

Kakashi was startled by the kindness the stranger showed. He refused to let it be seen though. “Front, if you will. Sasuke and Itachi can join you. I'll guard your right side, Asuma on your left. The others will flank you. Is that sufficient for you?”

Maigo nodded. “Yes, it is. Shall we go?”

Kakashi nodded and signaled for the others to start forward. Maigo fell into line like he had always been apart of the team, much to Kakashi's surprise again.

*Well, it seems like we've picked up something interesting.* Kakashi thought as the started towards Konoha.
The Meeting

The Hokage regarded the small person in front of her. He was slim but built. His black coat was perfect for hiding all identifying features. Tsunade paused on his left hand, taking in the exposed tattoo. It didn't look like a sealing one, only a regular one. She tried to peer into the shadows of his hood, but it effectually hid his features.

“Maigo, did you say your name was?” Tsunade finally asked. She heard Jiraiya shift behind her. He was the only other one in the room. Tsunade had dismissed the retrieval team already.

Maigo nodded. “Yes, you may call me that. I have no true name anymore so it will do for now.”

Tsunade frowned. “No true name? Did you give away your other one?”

Maigo nodded again. “Yes, for freedom, you see. Being nameless has its advantages in travel. And no, I did not abandon my village. They abandoned me.”

Tsunade resisted the urge to wince. She knew what it was like to abandon someone… Tsunade shook herself mentally and nodded thoughtfully. “I understand.”

Maigo tilted his head and Tsunade saw a flash of ice blue in the shadows. “Can you please explain to me fully why I was summoned here?”

Tsunade nodded. “Our Council and I would like to offer you a place in our Shinobi Ranks. A man of your skill has much to offer our village.”

Maigo nodded. “I see… How much time do I have to consider your invitation?”

Tsunade paused and glanced back at Jiraiya. Jiraiya shrugged. Tsunade rolled her eyes and turned her attention back towards Maigo. “As long as you need. I will provide you with housing and living costs for as long as you decide to stay here regardless of your acceptance or declination of our invitation. Jiraiya here can show you around if you would like or I can have one of the Shinobi from the retrieval team show you around instead.”

Maigo nodded again and seemed to glance at Jiraiya. “Jiraiya-sama will do. Am I able to spar with your Shinobi? I won't be joining a weak village, if I choose to accept your offer.”

Tsunade smiled slightly. “I can arrange for spars. Anything else?”

Maigo tilted his head to the right. “Yes, I would like to know about the status of one Uzumaki Naruto, the Nine Tails Jinchuuriki.”

Tsunade froze and narrowed her eyes at him. “Uzumaki Naruto has been dishonored and kicked out of Konoha for four years now. We have not kept track of our ex-Shinobi. Why?”

Maigo shrugged. “I have heard stories of him. I was wondering how the Konoha 12 responded to his excommunication, that is all. I was simply curious as to why they all came to find little old me.”

Tsunade sighed but couldn't really blame him for his curiosity. She would wonder the same if she was in his position. “They took it hard, as did a great many of our other Shinobi. It would be wise of you not to bring his name up in a conversation. Those wounds are still fresh in the Shinobi of Konoha.”
Maigo nodded. “I see. Pardon me for my curiosity. I didn't mean to bring up bad memories.”

Tsunade waved away his apology. “It is not your fault. I fear Konoha gets criticized all the time for its decision to abandon a Shinobi of his worth.” She pursed her lips. “A Jinchuuriki is quite the prize for other villages.”

Maigo scoffed. “As is an assassin of my caliber. You are lucky Uchiha Itachi called me out of hiding when he did. I detest running from other would-be assassins and offers.”

Tsunade laughed. “I can hardly imagine you running. Now, it's been a long day and tomorrow the Council will probably call on you to question you. Be ready and please get some rest. You'll need it for tomorrow, Maigo.”

Maigo bowed slightly. “Thank you for your generosity and warning. I trust Jiraiya-sama can take me to my place of rest for now?”

Tsunade nodded and gestured towards Jiraiya. “Take him straight there and no detours to the hot springs. We still haven't fixed the wall.”

Maigo chuckled slightly and followed behind a pouting Jiraiya. As the disappeared out the window, Tsunade watched them and thought about Naruto and how much this stranger reminded her of him. But it was impossible, Naruto was gone.

Tsunade sighed and grabbed a paper off one of the many piles.

Maigo nodded his thanks to Jiraiya before he left him to his own devices. Jiraiya had proved him with a room in his own compound which was located on the edge of the village. It wasn't that far from the Hokage Compound or the Shinobi District. Maigo waited until he felt Jiraiya’s chakra leave the hallway before releasing the tension in his shoulders.

Kit, you're the dumbest person in the world. In the entire world. In this world and the next and the one after that one.

Maigo sighed to himself. Really? Is now the time to object? Could you have done that awhile ago?

Once you have made up your mind it is notoriously difficult to change. What's done is done, Kit. Now what’s your Grand Plan? You cannot rejoin the village.

Maigo set down his pack by the bed and walked towards the attached bathroom. I won't. I only want to see how everyone is. Once I know that, I'll reject Tsunade’s offer and leave.

Kurama snorted. No you won't, Kit. You'll find some reason to stay. And that first reason is bullshit. You already know all about them and their lives. You just don’t want to admit that despite your family now, you miss your old one too.

Maigo ignored Kurama and removed his coat and katana. He threw both items on the bed and stretched, glad to be rid of the thing for a few minutes. Konoha was as if always was in the summer; hot, dry and completely unsuitable for wearing a full coat no matter what any Shinobi said.

Maigo went curiously towards the mirror in the ensuite bathroom. Jiraiya had set him up in a surprisingly clean and spacious room. It had a full closet, full bathroom and large bedroom. It was done is soft grays and blues and had a calming effect.

The person that stared back at Miago was nothing like the boy that had originally left Konoha four
years ago. He still have the same blonde hair that now hung just past his shoulders and blue eyes but he had lost the last of his baby fat and grown into, if he was being vain, a very attractive young man. His eyes had lost their innocence. Instead they told of hard time mixed with good, dreams lost but new ones gained. They gleamed with power and had a hidden sadness underneath. They told his story better than any words did, no matter how hard Maigo tried to hide it. His skin itself was a little whiter, not his usual tanned color from his youth. That was due to the fact he almost never trained or went outside without his standard coat and hood on. It made his eyes stick out even more brightly and made his many scars, including the whisker ones on his cheeks, stand out like little spiderwebs on his skin. They glittered in the light.

His body underneath his black attire was hidden but it didn't matter. He knew what was underneath, every scar and every toned muscle. His short sleeves showed off his tattoo on his left hand and arm. It was a gift from some friends from the Land of Iron. It was an old samurai pattern, only given to those that were a friend of the samurai. After Maigo had trained there for just over a year, his teacher came forward and offered to give him the tattoo. They usually weren't as big or as intricate as his but once his main teacher came forward, other samurai and villagers asked his permission to add on and make it bigger. It actually stretched for his hand where his teacher had started and up across his shoulders and around his body before it stopped at his right hip. His left arm was covered, as were his shoulders before it come up around his right shoulder and around down his side. It was done is all black with iridescent colors thrown in by the children that had added to. The last one to add to it had ended the tattoo with a iridescent pink lining symbolizing that it was his goddaughter that finished it.

Maigo looked down at his hand and admired it. Even after almost two years of having this tattoo it still amazed him that a group of samurai that were usually weary of Shinobi had added them to their village, to their family. That had helped his finally helped his send that last letter to Tsunade. It helped make his words true.

Maigo tried to go back at least once a every three months and always sent letters and gifts. Kukiko, his goddaughter, was always excited about news from him and the gifts were just a bonus. She had been almost ten, too old almost, to have a new godfather but it was actually her that initiated it. After had had saved her and her family from a rogue team of Grass Shinobi, Kukiko had declared right afterwards that she wanted him for a godfather. Her mother and father had agreed and Maigo had been dragged back to the samurai village. That was the start of the best year of his life and he didn’t regret the tattoos one bit. The were a reminder of his new home, his new family and what he had gained from his banishment. (It also helped that Kukiko was the granddaughter of the Samurai Chief.)

Maigo sighed again and turned away from the mirror. He looked longingly at the shower before shrugging. Jiraiya had told him that dinner wasn’t for a few more hours and the spars wouldn’t start until tomorrow or the day after that. He had time to shower and change before anyone bothered him.

Maigo went back into the bedroom and took out a small scroll. It actually contained all of his belongings. It was an advanced sealing scroll he had picked up somewhere between the Land of Wind and Land of Earth. He had ran into an ancient sealing master and had learned various things for him before moving on. The last he heard, the sealing master had passed, leaving everything to a distance nephew in Iwagakure. Of course Maigo couldn’t visit him because of his parents but Maigo didn’t mind. The old man had given him copies of everything before Maigo had gone to Suna to talk to Gaara.

Maigo unrolled the scroll and waved his hand over it. Out from it popped and set of clothes, this time with a little emerald green thrown in. He would continue to wear the same coat, seeing as it was a gift from Tazuna and his family.
Maigo wasted no time stripping off his clothes and taking full advantage of a shower in a safe compound.
Conversations

Meanwhile, Maigo’s welcome party had dispersed and gone their separate ways. Neji had vanished into thin air while the rest of Team Gai had gone towards their separate houses. Team 10 had gone to get caught up on some training seeing as they didn’t really do anything on their mission. Team 7 plus Itachi all gathered at Ichiraku. It was no surprise that when they Iruka was already there.

Ichiraku had become the gathering place of all those close to Naruto. They did it in honor of him and tried to meet as one big group at least once a month. Even Neji appeared despite his busy ANBU schedule. Tsunade had ditched meeting and appearances to come more than once, never caring if the council got pissed or not. Half the time they scheduled meeting on those days to try and make her miss them. It never worked of course and only delayed their work as well as her’s.

Iruka eyed them as they walked up before slumping in defeat. When he had heard of the mission they were going on, he had been excited. He thought for sure the the masked figure was Naruto in disguise and that when they found him, he’d laugh at their shock and happily join the village again. He saw on their faces that that was not the case.

Teuchi saw them and immediately shouted out their orders without asking. They sat down and Kakashi gave him a eye smile and nodded their thanks. Teuchi smiled back and went about making their orders.

“So it wasn’t him then.” Iruka stated.

Kakashi, who was sitting next to him, shook his head and took his hand. They had became a couple a few months after Naruto was banished, mostly due to Naruto’s last conversation with Iruka before he left. Whatever he said had made Iruka finally give in to his feelings and stop denying Kakashi. It was a bittersweet thing.

“No, it doesn’t seem like it’s him. The chakra is off and Naruto was never that good at hiding his emotions.” Kakashi stated.

Iruka nodded. “I see. Well, how is this mysterious person? Interesting?”

Sasuke broke in with a broken laugh. “Very. If it wasn’t for Itachi, we would have walked right past him. How did you find him anyways?”

Itachi shrugged, a great deal of movement for the stoic Uchiha. “I felt like something was off. I could feel his energy, not his chakra but the actually force of his power. Maigo is not a weak person.”

Iruka raised an eyebrow at the name. “Maigo? As in lost child?”

Kakashi nodded. “Yep. It seems that his partner gave him the name because he doesn’t have one. Or at least he doesn’t have one now.”

Iruka frowned. “That is terrible. To not have a name…” Iruka traile off, thinking of Naruto and how even when he was called a demon, a monster, he still knew his name and was proud of it.

Sasuke scowled, annoyed. “I don’t get it. Why would Tsunade send us out to get him, someone who is more dangerous than Naruto ever was? Why didn’t she send us out to go and bring Naruto back home instead of some random Shinobi?”

Sakura sighed and laid a hand on her shoulder. “Sasuke… You know she can’t do that. And maybe
she also had hope that Maigo was Naruto. Also, we still don’t know what he sent her two years ago.”

Itachi moved a little, giving away his discomfortable and drawing the attention of everyone. Sasuke narrowed his eyes. “Is there something you’d like to tell us, Itachi?” Sasuke asked.

Itachi froze before he sighed. “Naruto gave Tsunade her necklace back and told her not to send teams and not to contact him anymore. He has moved on, from what I was able to gather.”

Sasuke’s face twisted in shock. “He...he wouldn’t do that. Naruto loved the village!”

Sakura was nodding along in agreement. “Yeah, if there was any way he could have come back he would have. Right?”

The others didn’t say a word. If Kakashi was being honest with himself, he always thought that it was a possibility that Naruto would move on. He was never one in the first place to concentrate on the past. He was always moving forward.

Iruka was shocked as well but also not. He was think along the same lines as Kakashi only he instantly understood what caused Naruto to write the final letter. “He found a family.”

Everyone turned to Iruka in confusion. Iruka smiled suddenly, even if it was a little sad. “Naruto found a family somewhere out there. They gave him what he needed to move on and tell Tsunade not to worry about him. But—” he held up a hand before anyone could argue with him “—that does not mean he doesn’t still care for us. If anything, he probably cares for us now more than ever. Before, he could see us everyday and always knew where we were. Now, he has to rely on rumors and gossip. It wouldn’t surprise me if Naruto actually figured out a way to get information for someone in the village without Tsunade knowing. Plausible deniability.”

Kakashi nodded. “I think you’re right. Naruto doesn’t abandon anyone he cares about. He would have found someway to get information on the village.”

Sasuke took a deep breathe to calm himself. What they were saying wasn’t wrong. Naruto was stubborn and strong. But something still nagged at him. “Then how did we lose his trail? Before, there were always rumors and spotting of Naruto at the Wave and various places where people knew him. If he did settle somewhere, why don’t we know where?”

Itachi shook his head. “Naruto, despite what everyone, including me, thought is actually very smart. There is no way Naruto would give himself and his family away without taking precautions. It is possible that Uzumaki Naruto is dead and another name has taken his place.”

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“Then Maigo could be Naruto. It fits.” Sakura stated.

Itachi shook his head before anyone, namely Sasuke and Iruka, could get their hopes up. “Maigo have been active for years, even before Naruto was banished. Within the Akatsuki, he was something of a myth. He brought down a few of the outer bases before disappearing for a year and destroying a very important outpost near Suna when he reappeared. It actually happened right before they planned to get the One Tailed Demon.”

Kakashi raised an eyebrow. “So you mean to tell me that Miago been active for years and no one knew?”

Itachi nodded his head. “Yes. He only went after those in the Akatsuki. That fact that he even came with us is amazing. If Maigo wasn’t interested in Konoha, he wouldn’t have come. Maigo is someone who the Akatsuki feared long before he defeated them. The first encounter with him was after the
Chunin Exams.” He didn’t have to say which Chunin Exam. Everyone knew. “He went after Orochimaru or at least a base of his. He destroyed it and everyone he found in it.”

Kakashi frowned. “He can’t be more than 20 or so. If he truly started then it would have made him around 12 or 13 when he destroyed the first base.”

Iruka frowned. “It can’t be Naruto then. He would have been with Jiraiya at the time. Whoever Maigo is, he certainly wasn’t Naruto.” Or at least a Naruto we knew. Iruka added silently. He was yet to be completely convinced that Maigo didn’t have some type of connection to Naruto. It was his gut feeling and it had never led him wrong before.

All talk of Naruto and Maigo stopped as Teuchi placed their food in front of them.

Dinner with Jiraiya was… awkward to say the least. Maigo refused to start a conversation. For one, Maigo wasn’t supposed to know anything about Jiraiya and Jiraiya legitimately knew nothing about Maigo. It was silent at the table as they ate some surprisingly good dango and rice. Maigo was surprised that Jiraiya had yet to break the silence with some good humor about his perverted books or Tsunade’s boobs.

Kit, he doesn’t trust you. He has yet to see your face or any identifying features. For all he knows, you wear the face of the snake.

Maigo held in a sigh but knew Kurama was right. “Is there anything more you can tell me about Konoha, Jiraiya-sama?” He might as well break the silence before it crushed them; he never did handle silence well as a child.

Jiraiya swallowed his bite of food. “Konoha is one of the Five Great Shinobi Countries. It was considered the strongest Shinobi Country but in the last few years, it's Shinobi population has struggled to maintain its status due to the losses after the Kyuubi Attack, Uchiha Massacre and the Chunin Invasion. The Council was also stupid enough to banish our Jinchuuriki, Uzumaki Naruto. We are not weak, not with the assortment of Shinobi we do have but it wouldn't hurt to have more help available to us.”

Maigo nodded. “Understandable.” And it really was. Even Suna had problems with their Shinobi population after the Chunin Exams and the deceitful work of Orochimaru.

Jiraiya eyed Maigo when he responded but failed to ask further questions. “Our most powerful Shinobi are the Uchiha Brothers, the Hokage and myself. The next most powerful would have to be the remain Konoha 12 and their senseis. It's really no surprise. When the Council banished Naruto, they all trained and worked their asses off to fill the power gap left by the blonde. If you really want to test your skills, I'd suggest you spar with Hyuga Neji and Rock Lee. They are the most powerful and skilled Shinobi besides the Uchiha Brothers. If you really want a challenge, I'd be will to spar with you. Hatake Kakashi would be more than willing to take you on. He always likes a challenge.”

Maigo didn't stop his eating as Jiraiya shared this information with him. He couldn't say he was really shocked with the power structure in Konoha. His contact had kept him up on it but his contact failed to mention what they did to achieve it. Maigo swallowed his bite of food and took a drink of water. He met Jiraiya's eyes even though Jiraiya could see his through the shadows of his cloak. The merits of jutsu.

“Jiraiya-sama, why are you telling me all this?”

Jiraiya sighed. “I am telling you this in hopes of you joining our village. It would help Konoha and
maybe bring peace of mind to a few Shinobi. Also…” Jiraiya trailed off before he smiled brightly. “I think you need a home, one were you when people of the same skills watching your back. I know what the tattoos mean on your hand. It's something I haven't seen since my youth but I could never forget the stories of the Samurai.”

Maigo resisted the urge to flinch back at Jiraiya’s smile. While he was confident that Jiraiya didn't know his actually identity, Jiraiya had a feeling about him. He might be able to fool the others for a while but Jiraiya had “trained” him for three years, learned his habits and his secrets slowly but surely. “Are you the only one that knows?” Maigo finally asked.

Jiraiya threw his head back and laughed. “Probably. It has been years since any Shinobi has had contact with the Samurai. I would ask how you found them, but with a name like Maigo, it isn't hard to put together.”

Maigo chuckled. “No, it's really not, is it?”

Jiraiya nodded before frowning. Maigo could tell that he wanted to ask something. “The rumors… the rumors you have heard about Naruto… what are they? We haven't heard anything in over two years from him or about him.”

**Kit, be very careful here. Jiraiya could make you.**

Maigo mentally nodded at Kurama’s advice. He knew how to play the game better than Kurama thought he did. “I have heard that Uzumaki Naruto disappeared just around two years ago. No one has seen or heard from him since then. Before that… he was doing very well for himself, staying away from hunter-nin and ANBU Assassins from Konoha and other villages but the rumor is that the Hokage did not send for those ANBU or approve of those missions. Within the Suna circuit, it is said that the Kazekage sent his own ANBU and hunter-nin out to protect Uzumaki for the other villages. Of course those mission where S-Class Secrets and those ANBU sworn to never reveal what they were doing.”

Jiraiya laughed. “Ah, that sounds like Gaara. It is only because Naruto got to Gaara first before the news broke that he didn’t break friendly relations with the village. It was a rough first year between the two Kages and the Elder Council. Tsunade should have gotten rid of them when she had the chance. They always makes things difficult.”

Maigo nodded and looked down at his finished food with a slight smile. He usually didn’t eat all that much in the presences of others. It was a habit he picked up out on the road. “I have heard that through the grapevine.”

Jiraiya hummed and scanned the table, finally noticing that dinner had been finished sometime during the conversation. “I see that you enjoyed your meal, Maigo-san. I’ll clean it up and you can turn in if you want. I know it’s early but the Hokage sent a ANBU with a message that informed me that early tomorrow morning your first spar is set to happen. I must warn you though, you will have a lot of ANBU watching you. They’re on high alert right now.”

Maigo laughed for the first time in awhile; it was a true, belly hurting laugh. “As if the ANBU would be able to stop me.” Maigo stood up and nodded his thanks to Jiraiya. “Thank you for the meal, Jiraiya-sama. I will see you tomorrow morning.”

Maigo could feel Jiraiya stare holes through his jacket as Maigo headed towards his room.

***Kit, I have to hand it to: you sure know how to get into impossible situations.***
Maigo ignored Kurama’s laughing.
The next morning Maigo was actually surprised that Jiraiya was up bright and early. The sun had barely risen, giving Konohar an ethereal look to it. Mist was vanishing in the sun as the dew evaporated into the air. Maigo could ready feel the heat and cursed his very unique looks for making his coat essential for his person. He could hear Kurama laughing at his predicament. He ignored him in favor of taking into account the number of ANBU and various Shinobi hidden around the training ground. Jiraiya hadn't been kidding; there were three 4 man teams of ANBU surrounding the training grounds along with all the Konoha 12, a few Jonin and Chunin and the odd gathering of Genin that had obviously followed their Jonin Senseis to the training grounds, even at the break of dawn. Maigo felt out for Tsunade's chakra wasn't disappointed. It seemed that even Shizune and Tonton were here.

Maigo sighed. Oh well. Maybe he could at least get the Genin to leave if he mentioned it. Maigo turned to Jiraiya, a smile playing on his hidden face. “You were right, Jiraiya-sama. It seems I do have quite the crowd around me and while I don’t mind, maybe the Genin would be better off training?”

There were curses to the left of Maigo and Jiraiya. Jiraiya sighed and looked towards the sky in defeat. “I thought the ANBU were supposed to repress the crowd, not let more people in the training grounds.” The Chunin scrambled out of the bushes and Maigo resisted the urge to snicker. Of course it was Konohamaru, Udon and Moegi. Behind them were obviously some of the genin that idol them or at least Konohamaru. Konohamaru’s face was bright red and he stuttered.

“Sorry, sorry. They followed us here. See they…” Maigo stopped listening as Konohamaru continued to ramble out excuses for their presence at a supposed protected training grounds.

Maigo continued to watch in amusement as Tsunade order that Konohamaru and his team leave and take the Genin with them. It was quite funny to see how fast the six of them ran away for her rage filled gaze that was so obviously fake. Once that was done, Tsunade turned to Maigo with a bright smile. “Sorry about that, it won’t happen again. I’ll make sure only Shinobi that I allow are at your spars.”

Maigo nodded. “Of course, Hokage-sama. It would be safer for everyone anyways.” He felt some of Jonin leave once the Tsunade gave her dismissal of the unneeded viewers. He felt most of the gathering Jonin leave along with all but one Chunin. It was probably Iruka. Once everyone left, it was just his welcome party, the ANBU, Jiraiya and Tsunade left, along with Shizune and Tonton.

“Who is my first opponent, Hokage-sama?” Maigo asked, still mostly amused.

Tsunade narrowed her eyes. “Your first opponent is me. I thought I’d give you a good warm up before the others had their goes at you. Is that alright, Maigo-san?”

Maigo nodded, oddly giddy. Obviously she want to test him in terms of strength without tiring him too much. “Of course, Ho-” Maigo was cut off as Tsunade launched herself at him with a fist poised to hit him directly in the face.

Maigo darted to the side only to dance away again when Tsunade barely gave him enough time to get his feet under him before attacking again. Maigo gathered his chakra and pushed it into his feet. He turned and vanished right as Tsunade was about to land a strike. It hit the ground, causing it to shatter. Obviously she was using all of her strength at the moment. That was when Maigo decided to attack back.
Maigo appeared behind the Hokage and threw a punch of his own, testing to see if his strength could hold out against the great Hokage known for her strength. Tsunade smirked and went to grab his fist when she sensed the chakra gathered it in. Her eyes widened as she made a quick getaway using a replacement. Maigo fist struck a clone instead and everyone watched as the clone didn’t have a chance to displace; it was completely destroyed when Maigo’s fist went through it and he hit the tree instead. The tree shattered on impact, leaving a gap in the perfect tree line. Maigo turned and shook out his hand, absentmindedly noticing that the skin on his knuckles was cracked and bleeding. He rubbed his hand to get rid of the blood as Tsunade watched. He pulled his other hand away and her eyes widened as she noticed the hand was healed. She narrowed her eyes.

“If that had hit me, I’d be seriously injured or dead.” Tsunade said into the suddenly quiet training ground. She tilted her head. “You mixed the chakra in your fist with wind chakra, causing your skin to crack and the force of your punch to continue until it hit something, to pulverise it.” She glared down at his hand. “You then use natural chakra to line your chakra passages, allowing you to heal almost instantly, with barely any scarring.”

Maigo nodded. “Yes, you are right. It enables me to use techniques that would have and should have destroyed my chakra coils a very long time ago. Very handy but hard to maintain for a extended amount of time.”

Tsunade smiled and looked to into the trees to the right. “Oi, I want you to test his taijutsu, genjutsu, ninjutsu and anything else you can think of throughout the day. His strength is like mine so beware and don’t let him get a hand on you; it’ll hurt ya if he does.” With that she vanished in a swirl of leaves, leaving him at the mercy of the other Konoha Shinobi.

Maigo and Kurama wore matching smiles; it was shaping up to be a good day.

Maigo had thought that they would break up the spars into multiple days but he was wrong. Instead, it was one spar after another without even a break at noon for lunch. Maigo was glad that he was in such good shape after running from assassins and hunter-nin for years because without it, he would have tired hours ago. Maigo watch as his latest opponent stretched out his limbs. It was one person Maigo wasn’t sure he could beat without some other help.

Lee stretched out his muscles with a long sigh. So far only Tsunade, Shikamaru, Choji, Ino, and Sai had gone. Some were like Tsunade, where the match was called after Maigo showed some deadly skill. Others, like Shikamaru for example, went on for a couple of hours before Shikamaru had bowed out, saying it was too troublesome to capture Maigo using shadows. Sai’s spar had by far been the most entertaining seeing as Sai had come out of it covered in his own ink even though no one, not even Shikamaru, had been able to figure out exactly how Maigo had managed that.

Lee was excited to test Maigo’s taijutsu. It would hopefully reveal more about the hooded figure. Lee was told before the spars to target his hood to see what type of reaction Maigo had before taking it any further. If Maigo showed any fear at his face being shown, the match was to stopped and it was the rest of Team Gai’s turn to see if they could get the hood off. Tsunade wanted to see how far she could push the Shinobi before he snapped.

Lee straightened up and looked at his opponent. Lee gave Maigo a bright smile. “It is now time to dazzle you with my youthful strength! I promise to make you hurt youthfully again!”

Silence met his statement while the rest of the Shinobi gathered, including the ANBU, facepalmed. Lee… was special. That was all that could be said for both him and Gai as Gai started to bawl his
eyes out at Lee’s declaration.

Lee continued to smile before he attacked quickly and without warning. He went first for Maigo’s torso, hoping to keep his true target secret until it was too late. Maigo stepped backwards and spun so Lee went sailing past him. As Lee pass him, Lee struck out with a hand, intent on hitting Maigo square in the face.

It was like Maigo had anticipated it. Maigo wasted no time dropping under Lee’s jab and striking out with one of his own. Maigo’s chakra infused fist barely missed Lee as Lee flinched sideways and out of harm’s way.

Lee rolled to a stop and landed on his feet meters away from Maigo. Maigo stood up slowly and rolled his shoulders.

“I must say… I wasn’t expecting that.” Maigo admitted. “You almost tricked me, almost.”

Lee grinned brightly. “That was my youthful intentions.”

Maigo nodded and decided to move first. He blurred out of existence only to materialize right in front of Lee. Lee put his arms up to block the blow, only to be blasted backwards as Maigo’s kick broke through Lee’s guard. Lee coughed and picked himself out of the remains of the tree he had been blown back into. Lee sighed quietly and started to unwrap his arms and legs.

Maigo started walking backwards wearily. Kurama?

Kit, you might want to brace yourself for a few hits. You can’t move as fast as he can. You’d have to enter Sage or Bijuu Mode. Lee is practically a master as taijutsu.

What do you recommend I due then? Ninjutsu is my specialty but this is a taijutsu spar.

Hit harder than he can and twice as often. You already got his once; aim for the pressure points in his body. Those are probably his only weakness and I doubt he’ll open all the Chakra Gates for a simple spar.

Maigo nodded absentmindedly. Thanks Kurama.

Anytime but I still think you’re the dumbest person in the world and quite a few others.

I take it back. You suck, you old stinky fox.

Kurama laughed and receded into Maigo’s mind. Maigo readied himself for a few tough hits and wasn’t disappointed.

Lee had definitely gotten stronger and without the weights, he was at least twice as fast as Maigo in his current state. Maigo knew some ways to ramify that but it was considered cheating to use ninjutsu in a taijutsu spar.

As Lee land hit after hit on Maigo, he once again went for the hood. Maigo was trying his best to get out of Lee’s range but it was almost impossible until Maigo caught on to where most of Lee’s attention was at. Maigo felt a brief moment of panic as Lee’s fingers brushed the fabric of his hood.

Kurama! We have an issue! He’s going after the hood!

Kit! Calm down, I have a plan. You have the jutsu activated to make the shadows seem darker right?
Yeah, of course I do! What does that have to do with anything?!

As long as you have shadows on your face, they won’t be able to see it. Worst come to worst, vanish into the shadows and say you’re done for today. They can’t and won’t outright attack you again to see your face.

Maigo took a deep breath and flinched away from Lee’s hand as it came towards his face again. Okay Kurama. I’ll try it your way. Maigo broke away from Lee and put a few feet between them while trying to work out a strategy. He’d have to trick Lee somehow and turn this match into a tie.

Meanwhile, the Uchiha brothers sat on the sidelines watching Lee get closer and closer to revealing Maigo’s face.

In Itachi’s personal opinion he thought it was quite cruel of the Hokage to go about it the way she was. It would only create distrust between Konoha and Maigo if he felt threatened. He’d refuse Tsunade’s offer and vanish back into the dark he had came from. They’d never find him again unless Maigo wanted them too.

Sasuke’s thoughts contradicted his brother’s. He wanted to see Maigo’s face. He wanted to make sure it wasn’t Naruto, no matter what Itachi and Kakashi said about the timelines not matching up. Sasuke had always thought the blonde dobe had hid his real strength and he longed to find out if he had always been right. Something about Maigo and Naruto was too similar not to want to connect.

Sasuke and Itachi straightened up as Maigo broke away from Lee after one too many grabs at his hood. Itachi could read Maigo’s irritation through his stiff posture and tense shoulders. Itachi let a frown mar his features as he felt Kakashi and Iruka glance towards him. He knew they didn’t feel comfortable about this either, especially Kakashi because he too hid his features behind a mask which was what the hood was to Maigo: a mask to protect himself. Itachi could count on one hand how many people had tried to take off Kakashi’s mask and survive. Namely, it was Team 7 and Iruka. So four with a finger left over.

Sasuke ignored the looks between the three. He watched as Maigo continued to tense up and disappear into himself. Sasuke winced and started to frown as well.

“Maybe it would have just been easier to ask…” Sasuke muttered so only Itachi, Kakashi and Iruka could hear him.

Itachi flicked his forehead hard enough to make Sasuke wince. “You don’t say?” He hissed back, unusually sarcastic at the moment.

Kakashi interrupted before the brothers could start their own “spar” on the sidelines. It would be a great way to stop Lee though… Kakashi shook his head and continued from where he had paused. “Let’s just hope Miago-san doesn’t lose it, got it? He single handedly took on and out the Akatsuki. Lee doesn’t stand a chance if he starts to use his ninjutsu. I will be having a talk with the Hokage later though.”

The brothers nodded, slightly afraid of the gleam in Kakashi’s eye as he whispered out the last part of his speech. Iruka sighed but refrained from saying anything. He was just as curious as Sasuke but completely understood where Kakashi was coming from. It took Kakashi almost a year to be able to eat with Iruka and two more to feel comfortable enough with walking around their house without it on 24/7. And even then, Kakashi had his bad moments where Iruka wouldn’t see his face for weeks.
Maigo took a few deep breaths to calm himself. It wouldn’t due to panic now; his hood had become his shield that not even Kukiko could break. Oh, she knew what he looked like; everyone in the Samurai Village did. But that didn’t mean that he walked around with his hood off. They only saw his face a handful of times the last time being when he was topless and getting tattooed by them. It didn’t bother them; they knew that Shinobi were odd and had odd superstitions and accepted Maigo’s quark as one of them. Maigo had never corrected them and life had continued on. That was until Lee, who is probably acting on orders from the Hokage, decided to try and reveal his face for all to see.

Maigo scanned Lee’s body and stance before focusing on his eyes. Lee shivered as if he physically feel the weight of Maigo’s gaze.

“You know, it is considered impolite to disrobe someone without their permission.” Maigo stated flatly. He saw how all of Team Gai winced and internally groaned. So even if I beat Lee, I have to deal with Tenten, Neji and Gai. Just fucking fantastic.

Kurama was oddly silent but Maigo didn’t let that bother him. Sometime Kurama knew when his opinion wasn’t really wanted especial during combat, even it is was a silly spar.

Lee hid his wince behind a bright smile that was so fake, even Lee himself seemed to sag under the pressure of it. “Ah, Maigo-san, what do you mean? I would never-”

“Save it, Lee-san. I know the Hokage put you up to this and because of that, I wish to retire for today. We may pick this back up for where we left it tomorrow if you would like?”

Lee cautiously nodded head. “Of course, Maigo-san.” Lee let his posture relax. It was a mistake and Maigo let Lee, and everyone else, know it.

Before anyone could blink or react, Maigo had Lee pinned to the ground with a kunai at his throat. Maigo glared down at the prone figure and snarled. “Don’t. Ever. Try. That. Again. Got. It?” Each word was short and spoken through clenched teeth.

Lee nodded his agreement even as the kunai drew a thin red line across his throat. Maigo glared again for good measure and let Lee up. Lee sat up cautiously while the bystanders watched in shock and silence.

Maigo stood up and nodded to Jiraiya. “I will see you at dinner.” He vanished without another word.

Itachi shook his head and stood up. “I hope he actually shows up for your dinner Jiraiya.”

Jiraiya looked disgruntled. “I will say the old hag has made a mistake and a big one at that. Where is she?” Jiraiya directed the question at the nearest ANBU.

The ANBU in a snake mask appeared. “The Hokage-Sama is currently in a meeting with the Council to discuss Miago-San’s acceptance into the Shinobi Ranks.”
Jiraiya shook his head and looked at Kakashi. Kakashi smiled and stood. “I'll take care of it.” Kakashi vanished and left the leaves behind. The ANBU froze before going after Kakashi. Jiraiya just shook his head. Kakashi was the best for a reason.

Sasuke scowled. “Okay maybe that plan was stupid.”

Shikamaru just raised an eyebrow at him. “Maigo is someone I wouldn’t want to face in actual combat. He could have easily taken Lee out sooner but he was adhering to the rules of the spar. He didn’t even bother to use chakra or jutsu to take Lee down at the end. He simply tricked Lee into dropping his guard.”

Neji nodded his agreement. “Maigo had Lee the whole time. Had he caught on sooner to Lee’s intentions, the match would have been even shorter than it was. Tenten and I will have very hard spars tomorrow. He was not happy.”

Tenten groaned. “Do we have to go after the fucking mask? I just want to fight the guy. I don’t care what he looks like as long as he’s strong.”

Sakura raised an eyebrow. “So you’re not the least bit interested to know what he looks like under the hood? Or if he is in fact Naruto?”

Tenten snorted. “Of course I’m curious but not cruel. He’ll either show us when the time is right or never. It’s his business. And if it is that loudmouth, he has his reasons for not revealing himself to us.”

“And if Maigo is in fact Naruto, he’s actually much safer deceiving us because he was banished. Unless Tsunade and the Council overrule their previous ruling, he’s not welcomed or allowed in Konoha. They could execute him for coming back and there is nothing Tsunade could do to stop it this time.” Shikamaru finished explaining. He knew that if Miago was indeed Naruto, he would tell them sooner than later or when the time was right and there weren’t 12 ANBU in the audience.

Iruka grunted as he got up off the ground. Even though he didn’t do anything, he was tired mentally. He had been watching closely, trying to find some glimpse through the shadows or some move similar to those of Naruto’s. “Well, I’m going home. Hopefully Kakashi doesn’t do something stupid like assassinating Tsunade.” That got a laugh from everybody.

Iruka turned to go hoping that Maigo decided to stay. Even if he wasn’t Naruto, he was a lost child and every child deserves a home and a family.
Kit, you this could very well happen. You can’t just vanish now.

And here I thought you would be overjoyed at me leaving the village again. Maigo folded the last of his clothes and sealed them into this scroll.

Kit… you are acting like a rash child. The old hag has learned her lesson now; you’re safe and in a comfortable space. Calm down and think rationally. You’ve worked so hard for this chance and at the first sign of trouble you run. What happened to the brash idiot from your youth?

He was tortured out of me somewhere between here and the Rain, that’s what happened. Maigo felt Kurama cringe and regretted his comment but didn’t take it back. He was right after all; he had the scars, the only ones Kurama had tried but failed to get rid of, on his back and right arm. There was a reason the tattoo took over his left one.

Well that’s bullshit. I know he’s still there. He was there when you decided to take on the Akatsuki and accept Kikuko as your goddaughter. He was there when the Samurai tattooed you.

Maigo stopped what he was doing and thought about Kurama’s words. He wasn’t wrong. The young Naruto was somewhere within him at all times. He came out a bit during his spar with Sai earlier. He was always somewhere at all times. Maigo sagged and sat on the edge of the bed. He set the scroll beside him before laying down, leaving his feet on the floor.

Maigo held his hands up in the air and watched as the dying light painted them in a pretty gold; it reminded him of the skin tone of his youth. The tattoo was a sharp contrast to his scarred right arm. Where the tattoo was beautiful and perfect, the scars were raised and ugly. The showed a moment of weakness, one that had almost killed him. He was actually surprised that no one had noticed it yet, not that it was that obvious to begin with. The bones had grown back straight and he had full use of his hand. The scars were light, no more than a little sliver line when the light touched them. It was when you got to his forearm that the scars become raised and ugly, red around the edges and white in the center. The scars continued all up his arm from the forearm to the shoulder before stopping at the edge of his tattoo. They started again at the top of his spine and went downwards. The tattoos never crossed them, just went around the scars on his shoulders, showing his courage, as Kikuko put it, and the love of his family.

When put side by side in the dying light, Maigo was amused to see both looked beautiful. He was tattooed with love and hatred that was so fitting of his life. Maigo didn’t blame anyone for either feeling; everyone felt them and had those emotions directed towards them. He was just unlucky enough to get more hatred than love in his life.

Maigo let his arms fall to his sides with a sigh. Kurama was right once again; he couldn’t disappear now, not when he was close to what he had always wanted. It would be giving up and a failure if he left now. He glared up to the ceiling, annoyed. Fine but if this happens tomorrow I won’t be as nice as I was today. They’ll get a taste of the Maigo that destroyed the Akatsuki.

Kit, I think that is what they’re waiting for. Tsunade has a reason for asking you to join the village beside that the fact they need Shinobi. Are you sure she doesn’t know who you are?

Miago frowned. No, she shouldn’t and couldn’t know. Uzumaki Naruto died when he entered the Samurai Village half dead.
Okay Kit, if you’re sure. Our spy wouldn’t have given us away right?

Maigo snorted. *She’s the least likely person the old hag would suspect. Our spy is safe. It’s ourselves we should be concerned about.*

You’ve gone through more than 90% of your peers have. If you can’t leave the village and escape ANBU after everything, I will find a way out of this seal. I swear.

Maigo rolled his eyes and smiled. *I see your point.*

*I sure hope so. Now get up and unpack. You have dinner to look forward too in a few hours.*

Miago arrived on time for dinner, much to Jiraiya’s surprise. He had expected that Maigo would disappear. He gave Maigo a tight smile as he sat down. He noticed the that shadows that hid his face seemed even darker then they did during the spars.

Jiraiya sighed and waited a few minutes until breaking the silence. “I am sorry, Maigo-san. The Hokage thought it would be a good idea to see how far you could be pushed before snapping. It was not the way to approach it thought.”

Maigo was silent for a few moments after Jiraiya finished. Jiraiya wondered if Maigo was even listening to him. After a moment, Maigo sighed and reached for his drink. He took a long drink and set it back down gently. Jiraiya just waited patiently. “It… it is okay. If I was in her position I might have done the same thing. As long as Team Gai won’t be continuing the mission I have no problems continuing with the spars.”

Jiraiya nodded. “I don’t think it’ll be probably but they will still push you. Tsunade is… well determined to see how strong you are. She’s wants to see if the rumors are true.”

*See, kit! I know what I’m talking about.*

Maigo rolled his eyes but ignored Kurama to keep talking to Jiraiya. “I know. I just would… hate to kill any shinobi in a spar. Most of what I used to take down the Akatsuki is not something most shinobi would ever be able to go up against, no matter how strong some of the jonin are here. I was fighting all S-Class and above missing-nin. They are not quite up to that caliber nor do they disregard most unspoken rules of combat.”

Jiraiya sighed. “Yes, missing-nin really do abide by the ‘anything goes’ rule. Just try to give her some of what she wants without killing anyone.”

Maigo nodded and they descended into silence for the rest of the meal.
Maigo looked at Neji. He was on the other side of the training field getting ready for their spar. If there was one person Maigo really didn’t want to fight it was Neji. Maigo knew his chakra and chakra pathways had changed enough over the years that Neji would never recognize him but the Byakugan was an annoying dojutsu to go up against. It wasn’t as annoying as the Sharingan but it was a close second. Even the Rinnegan wasn’t annoying once you knew all its powers.

Now, he knew where the blind spot was but unless he really decided to kill Neji because he become too annoying, it wasn’t worth it to tip his hand yet. The Byakugan’s blind spot was a close kept secret in Konoha and if they even suspected he knew it… well as confident Kurama was in Maigo’s abilities to escape Konoha that didn’t mean he wanted to waste the energy doing so.

Kurama was laughing in his mindscape and Maigo frowned before sitting down in the lotus position and closing his eyes. In moments he was in mindscape looking at Kurama rolling on the ground laughing.

“What could possibly so funny?” Maigo asked as he crossed his arms.

Kurama just continued to laugh while Maigo stared. After a few minutes Kurama quieted down. He rolled over and looked at Maigo. “You are going to have such a fun time against him. The last time you fought him was the Chunin Exams. Sure, he’s in Anbu and he’s a good one at that but isn’t close to our level. It’ll but so much fun because you can just screw with him.”

Maigo sighed but smiled slightly too. “Okay, I see your point. But why was that so funny?”

Kurama smirked. “Because once you kick his ass the Uchiha brat and his older brat brother will want to fight you. Then you can show them all why you took take care of the Akatsuki instead of them. There is no one that can beat you here. The only people alive right now that can are other Jinchuuriki. Maybe Sasuke if he’s unlocked all of the Sharingan’s powers.”

Maigo laughed and left his mindscape. He knew Kurama was right. While he didn’t like that he had to hide all his skills when he was living in Konoha, it did serve him well now. He only used a fraction of his skills after all to bring Sasuke and Itachi back. It was more difficult because he was trying to bring them back alive after all.

Maigo opened his eyes and stood up, ignoring all the interested looks directed towards him. Usually
he would be stretching like Neji but he had done it early that morning. He didn’t want to give away his skills after all.

Once Neji was done, he turned and faced Maigo. Maigo smiled slightly beneath his hood. It was hot, even in the early morning sun. It would only get hotter and while Maigo would love to shed the coat, he still needed it. Maybe he could pull out some other stuff... maybe a mask or sleeveless coat or hoodie...

Neji cleared his throat and Maigo abandoned all his thoughts of clothes to focus on Neji. Neji was an Anbu captain, if Maigo’s source was correct. He was supposedly the best assassin since Kakashi but that also meant he was used to working unseen with little fighting back. It was the exact opposite of how Maigo fought. While he new the skills to travel undetected and used them all the time, he fought straight on without hesitation. Hesitation had almost gotten him killed once.

Maigo nodded his head slightly. “A taijutsu fight, right?”

Neji inclined his head. “With ninjutsu and kenjutsu.”

Maigo nodded but he knew he wouldn’t need his katana and had left it at Jiraiya’s. Only a true sword master would be able to beat him. There was only one left in the Land of Iron that could still beat him on a regular basis and that was because it was the person that taught him how to handle a katana.

Neji got into his stance from the Chunin Exams. It was the standard taijutsu of the Hyuuga clan. Maigo rolled his eyes. Of course they wanted to see how he would handle classic Konoha clan techniques. Too bad he new how to counter each one.

Without warning Maigo darted forward and struck out with his left hand. Unsurprisingly Neji activated his Byakugan and countered, trying to close off his chakra pathways. Maigo smoothly avoided Neji’s chakra covered hand with a quiet laugh. It seemed that no matter what, Neji stayed true to his clan.

Neji turned 180 and tried to get a hit on his shoulder but missed by mere centimeters as Maigo dropped just enough then struck out his leg, hitting Neji’s unguarded side. Neji let out a rush of breath as he slide away from Maigo due to the force of his hit. Around them it had gone completely silent.
Maigo smirked. *Okay, maybe this is kinda fun.*

_Kit, I don’t know why you continue to doubt me._

Neji narrowed his eyes at his opponent. That kick… hurt. A lot. It felt like Lee’s kicks when he was wearing weights and he knew Maigo had pulled most of his strength from it but it still hurt.

Neji continued to narrow his eyes, trying to get a clear read on Maigo’s pathways. It almost seemed like he was constantly changing the direction of his chakra flow. Right now it was going against what seemed to be his natural flow of chakra. Like he was trying to prevent Neji from getting a clear read on his movements. It was unnerving.

“You know, you can just quit now. You can’t read my chakra and you won’t hit me unless I let you. I could beat you in a few moves but I don’t think the Hokage would approve if you ended up in the hospital because of a spar with me.” Maigo said, somewhat arrogantly.

Neji resisted the impulse to start to swear and glare. After the debacle that was yesterday, Tsunade has told the rest of them to forgo trying to uncover Maigo’s face and just test his skills to the best of their abilities. Since he couldn’t see Maigo’s chakra pathways and he somehow avoided all of his attempts at closing Maigo’s pathways, the smart move would be to end the spar and have another person try, like Sasuke or his brother. Possibly even Kakashi since he used the Sharingan almost as well as a Uchiha.

But Neji had promised Naruto never to give up. If this Maigo did turn out to be Naruto, he would ultimately be disappointed in him for not keeping his promise.

Neji straightened up and pulled out a kunai and a couple of exploding tags. Distraction and confusion would be what he needed to execute some of his Anbu skills.

Maigo laughed when he saw what Neji was trying to do. *Well at least he doesn’t give up easily.*

Kurama chuckled. *Of course not, kit. He made you a promise. I bet he’s trying to show you he kept*
Maigo frowned. *That would imply he knows who I really am.*

Kurama rolled his eyes. *No it doesn’t. I think he’s thinking that if it really is you, you’d be disappointed in him if he just gave up after one solid hit and a few missed punches. He’s trying to prove himself.*

Maigo sighed but continued to evade anything Neji tried to do. It was actually quite fun to see Neji use underhanded moves and techniques that would have killed at weaker opponent by now. Finally, Maigo decided that the match had gone on long enough, almost twice as long as Lee’s.

Maigo ended it with a burst of speed and a single chakra infused punch right in Neji’s blind spot.

Neji landed hard and looked slightly confused. Then he sighed and tried to get up slowly, still hellbend on beating him.

Maigo sighed but offered a hand up. Neji stared at it in confusion and distrust. “I hit you pretty hard. You probably have a concussion. You are a worthy opponent and anytime you want a rematch, I’m up for it. That was a lot of fun.” Maigo admitted.

Neji rolled his eyes and then grimaced. He accepted the outstretched hand without comment and Sakura came over to look him over.

Maigo rolled his eyes. *Really, they’re all ridiculous.*

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