When Shadows Creep

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Summary

At the academy, a monster lurks in the shadows.

Or, how a terrifying event for a lonely genin became an urban legend.

- Written for the KakaIru Mini Bang 2020!

Notes

My first fic (of three) for the KakaIru Mini Bang.

See the end of the work for more notes

The day had been a long, tiresome slog with a classroom full of pre-genin that had seemed absolutely determined to either drive Iruka insane, or maim him during weapons practice. It was almost time for the kids to go home, but clearly a few had other plans, if their whispering at the back of the classroom was anything to go by.

Of course Naruto and Shikamaru were involved in the not so secret discussion they were having, but Iruka was surprised to see Kiba and Choji also talking in hushed voices, their eyes full of mischief. Iruka listened in, channeling chakra to his ears to pick up some of their conversation.

“- we need to think about this strategically,” Shikamaru whispered. “It’s no use setting up anything obvious, and no, Naruto, we are not filling the classroom full of toads.”
“But, but, just imagine their faces! What about bugs?!”

“Shhhhhhh!” the other three boys hissed out, Kiba clamping his hand over Naruto’s mouth.

“If Iruka Sensei catches us planning this then it would be troublesome, and I’d rather not get an earful from my Mom,” Shikamaru grumbled, keeping his voice low.

The boys had been so caught up in their discussion that they hadn’t noticed Iruka flickering from the front of the classroom, crouched behind them, leaning forward to say, “if I catch you planning what, exactly?”

Iruka could practically see the dread descend upon Naruto, Shikamaru, Choji, and Kiba, their bodies tensing up as they turned to look behind them, realising that Iruka had heard everything.

“Sensei, it’s not what you think! It’s just a joke, really. We weren’t gonna break in, I swear!” Naruto all but yelled, gesturing his arms around wildly, like that would make it all the more convincing, as though he hadn’t just revealed what they had been planning.

It was perhaps a little cruel, the thought that popped into Iruka’s head, but two can play at that game, as they say. “Thank goodness, I was worried for a moment,” Iruka said, stretching to stand, looking around the classroom at all the kids now staring at him.

“Why would you be worried, sensei?” Sakura asked.

The rest of the class chimed in, too, asking the same question. It was Ino who really got the ball rolling, though, just as Iruka had hoped. With as much seriousness as an eleven year old could muster, she said, “you guys don’t know about shadows that eat children?”

Everyone gasped, horror crossing their faces.

*Hook, line, and sinker, Iruka thought.*

“Is it true, sensei?” Naruto’s eyes were wide, and he’d moved closer to Iruka, his small hands gripping at Iruka’s pant leg.

“Back when I had just graduated, a genin broke into the academy and said that he was attacked by a shadow monster. He swore that it came out of nowhere, that all of a sudden the shadows came to life, reaching out with inky tendrils flailing in all directions and trying to drag him into the darkness.”

The entire classroom had fallen silent, not a sound to be heard from the usually loud and rowdy pre-genin. Iruka continued to weave his story, telling them about how the boy had been caught by the shadows, how scared he had been when it started dragging him closer to the darkness, but that he’d only escaped because his sensei had suddenly appeared. By the time Iruka had finished talking, class was over, and the kids all but ran out of the classroom, fleeing the academy grounds quicker than he’d ever seen before.

All except Naruto, who was still holding onto Iruka for dear life.

“Sensei,” he whined, pressing his face into the bottom of Iruka’s flak jacket.

“Hey, class is over so you don’t need to call me sensei now.”

“Iruka-nii, can we go now? I don’t want to be eaten by a shadow monster.”
“Yeah, come on,” Iruka replied, slinging his satchel over his shoulder and taking Naruto’s hand in his. “Let’s go home.”

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Finally, Naruto was asleep, breathing deeply and cuddled up with Kakashi’s ninken. His small body was barely visible with how the ninken had sprawled themselves across his futon. It was such a heartwarming sight, never failing to bring a smile to Iruka’s face.

With a soft click, he closed Naruto’s bedroom door, quietly padding across the hallway and into the lounge.

“He finally asleep?” Kakashi asked, looking up from his book and gesturing for Iruka to sit down.

Plopping himself down on the sofa, Iruka leaned against Kakashi, resting his head on a pale shoulder, sighing when he felt fingers massaging his scalp. It had been a long day, and the way Kakashi ran his fingers through his hair, then down his neck to work out the knots there had Iruka almost falling asleep. “Mnnnn,” he replied, eyes fluttering closed.

“So, what had Naruto looking so spooked when I came home?”

Tipping his head back, Iruka looked up, grinning as he said “ahh, I might have told my class about the shadow monster when I heard him and his friends plotting to break into the academy and fill my classroom full of toads.”

The bark of laughter from Kakashi was music to his ears. Without the mask to hide his face, Iruka could see the dimples from his wide smile, and the way his entire face lit up with amusement. Iruka wasn’t sure he would ever get used to seeing Kakashi smiling, relaxed and carefree in his company, even after years together.

“You didn’t… holy shit, Ru!” His whole body was shaking with laughter, and Kakashi put his book down to drag Iruka into his lap, wrapping both arms around his waist. “Who would have thought your escapades as a genin would have become something of an urban legend.”

“You laugh, but it wasn’t funny at the time,” Iruka said, pushing the wild mop of hair out of Kakashi’s face. “Having your jounin sensei decide to scare the shit out of you and make you think that a real monster had actually gotten hold of you was terrifying.”

At the time, Iruka had been utterly terrified, and after telling his friends about what had happened, the story had spread, slowly morphing into something much more sinister than what had actually happened. Clearly the legend had lived on beyond Iruka’s generation, the details passed down and the story continuing to evolve and change.

“And then like a good shinobi, Shikaku comes in to save the day,” Kakashi chuckled. “I can’t believe it took you years to figure out that it was him all along. Someone didn’t look underneath the underneath.”

Iruka pouted, jamming his fingers under Kakashi’s armpits and tickling, making him squirm. “Oi, I was only twelve.”

It had been a desperately lonely time back then, and Iruka had been starving for attention, acting
out in the only way he knew how. It didn’t matter if the attention he got was negative, all that mattered was that someone would see him. They never did, though. Not truly, not in the way that counted, not until Shikaku, who had “saved” him that night all those years ago, and then opened his heart and home, all but adopting Iruka into the Nara clan.

“I am grateful to him, though. His methods might have been a bit backwards, but I don’t think I would have opened up to him otherwise.” Tiredness was really catching up to him, and Iruka slumped forward, curving his back and pushing his face into the crook of Kakashi’s neck.

“I’m glad he was there for you, Ru,” Kakashi said softly, dropping a kiss to the top of Iruka’s head. “Don’t forget we have Shikamaru sleeping over tomorrow night.”

Iruka yawned, long and low, letting his body go lax in Kakashi’s arms. “I know,” he replied, yawning again as he did.

Kakashi’s clever fingers found their way back into Iruka’s hair, twirling the long strands around his fingers and whispered, “come on, let’s go to bed.”

End Notes

Huge thanks and credit to Kalira for being my beta on this fic ♡

Thank you so much for reading! ♡ I appreciate every single kudos and comment. Let me know your thoughts below! I encourage all comments, even if it’s a short comment, flailing or emojis.

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