It Takes A Village

by MusesatMidnight

Summary
"It takes a village to raise a child"

Uzushio is that village. She's been alive longer than anyone else, has loved and lost more children than anyone can comprehend. She's more than just the ninja village and after the Fall she has had enough. She ventures out into the world to look for her lost children. Along the way she becomes a magnet for abandoned, lost and dangerous children (She wonders if all adults are incompetent at childcare? Maybe she should write a parenting manual at the end of all this? Sage knows the parents and villages her foundlings are from could do with one!). Mama Uzu builds a family and feeds them. Maybe she fixes some problems along the way, after all isn't that what mothers do?

Jincharukiki-centric (because those babies were hard done by), strong female characters (because they were also hard done by) and people have conversations and hugs (because they are necessary for healthy growth).

Next Chapter - Itachi Part Five: Itachi brings his secret girlfriend to dinner. Yugito is worried about offending her boyfriend's parents, especially as she isn't even meeting them for the first time as herself. Matatabi is cheering her on, mentally that is. Itachi gets a message...

Notes

I set myself some rules for this story:
Each chapter must be no more than 2000 words, no minimum set
Each chapter must end without a major cliffhanger
Not allowed to publish a chapter until the next one is started or completed

In this chapter (which is more of a prologue?) Kushina explores her relationship with Uzushio, leaves for Konoha, falls in love, has Naruto and dies to protect her child and husband.

- Inspired by Stormborn by blackkat
- Inspired by reverse by blackkat
Kushina

Kushina

*Kushina Uzumaki hated leaving her village. The reasons were numerous including the ones that might seem obvious; leaving her friends and family, being unable to play in the rivers and whirlpools, the ramen, the wildlife that she had watched and grown up knowing, the ramen, the fact that her new village only wanted her to be a cage for a demon and, of course, the ramen in Uzushio was the best in the world.

But the other reason was one that no human being who hadn’t been born in Uzushio would understand.

Uzushio was alive.

The village was more than just the collection of buildings and people who resided there. It was the very land, sea and sky of Whirlpool and it had a heartbeat and a consciousness. There were tales told by the oldest residents of how, in times of strife, Uzushio had led people to safe places previously unknown to all the villagers. How they had protected their people by creating storms off their coast, intensifying their hard to navigate whirlpools and hiding their island, their home, from view.

Kushina knew Uzushio was alive because on nights when she couldn’t sleep her village, and the land, would sing to her. Strange songs telling her about the osprey chicks hatching, of golden and crimson sunsets from long ago, about the fox skulk that resided amongst the plum trees, of birds soaring and diving off Uzushio’s red cliffs, of people long ago who first lived on Uzushio, of Uzushio’s first children who had such strange names, of the ramen shop owner who would go out every morning and light an incense stick at the grave of his wife with his teenage son accompanying him on special dates.

She knew Uzushio was alive because sometimes there had been a voice leading her to secret caverns to play in, introducing her to the dolphins and turtles that swam beyond the kelp forests, telling her when the plums were ripe, when the best storms were coming, when the group from Konoha came and when it was agreed that Kushina would leave.

When she left Uzushio she cried, and she felt it cry for her too.

*You are one of my children and this will always be your home.*

*Konoha was not alive, or at least not in the same way. The land and the village itself seemed duller to Kushina than Uzushio. She didn’t hate it, but it didn’t feel the same and it made her sad.

She missed listening to Uzushio in the middle of the night. She didn’t like the way the other children sniped at her because of her round face and red hair. She loved her hair.

It was the same red colour as the cliffs where the gulls nested in the spring and summer and raised their chicks. The same colour as the sands that surrounded her island and made it shine as if it were aflame. The same colour as the tiles on the rooftops of her beloved village. The same colour as some of the koi fish that swam in Uzushio’s pools. The same colour as some of the foxes that
would sneak through the village at night and eat the left out inari. The same colour as the nine torii
gates that led to the shrine at the highest point of Uzushio and the ones that were dotted around the
island.

That boy in class had nice hair too. Golden and bright like the beam of sunlight that used to fall
through one of the hidden caves of Uzushio and sparkle off the water creating light dances on the
cave walls. That had been one of Kushina’s favourite places to play. The boy, Minato, wasn’t as
fun as her cave but he did save her when she thought no one else would. And he loved his village,
and maybe she could love him like she loved Uzushio. She thought Minato would love Uzushio
too and she planned to take them back there one day, when she was old enough and strong enough
and the elders of Konoha wouldn’t squawk and complain about the Jinchuuriki leaving Konoha.

Then, Uzushio fell. And Kushina felt it.

It made her chest ache and her skin crawled as if being covered with Aburame bugs. Later, the
voice found her. It was a quivering whisper, borne on the winds that rushed from the oceans of her
home, so fragile and almost broken and it made her throat tighten.

_I am undone. My children fallen and my soul invaded. I couldn’t protect them, and I can’t protect
you my brave child. But my whirlpools are here, my oceans, beaches, cliffs, soil and caverns. My
self is in you, and you are a part of me._

Kushina wept and raged as Minato held her hand and they watched a red sky dawning over
Konoha, a crimson sky rising from the east. Uzushio had bled into the sky.

*  

The Third Hokage would later say that Minato Namikaze and Kushina Uzumaki died for Konoha.
It wasn’t true. Kushina didn’t die for Konoha, she died for her husband and her child because
although she cared for the Village Hidden in the Leaves, it did not love her like Uzushio did.

When she was dying, she felt a ghostly version of Uzushio again. The memory of ocean and salt-
spray kissing her cheeks, the wind whipping her hair. Uzushio was crying with her. Uzushio had
grown stronger since the fall and it reached out to her, one of its scattered children who cried out
for home and their mother at the end.

“Naruto. You are an Uzumaki. You are a child of Uzushio.” Kushina whispered as she stared down
at her wide-eyed baby who wailed at the burning in his stomach and soul. “Uzushio will look after
you. You just need to listen to their breeze and their stories, and you will know your clan, their
people and home as if I was here to love and guide you myself.”

_Kushina. I hear you. My sweet child. You can rest. I am here for Naruto. He is mine as you are._

She felt Minato and Uzushio embracing her and all she wished for was to be back on those beaches,
her child in her arms, her husband holding them both and Uzushio enfolded around them.

The morning after Kushina’s death came on quick heels, and the sun rose from the east once more.
The sky above Konoha was not crimson despite the loss of lives but instead was golden and bright,
celebrating the birth of Naruto.

Because Naruto Uzumaki was a child of Uzushio and they would celebrate and honour him even if
Konoha did not.

*
Uzushio - Part One

Chapter Summary

The Bijuu are born on Uzushio and Uzushio teaches them different things. A little exploration into all nine tailed beasts and their initial days.

Chapter Notes

Uzushio is a sentient land who is referred to in the pronouns 'they' and 'their'. It was tricky to write!
I essentially turned Uzushio into a Te Fiti (Moana) like character...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Uzushio

(Part One)

*

Uzushio was ancient. They had been awake and conscious long before animals gained sentience. Uzushio watched as the plants evolved on their soil, as trees bore fruit and their land was covered throughout the seasons in bold and riotous colours. They particularly loved the cherry blossoms that floated in their breeze and the acers with their gold, crimson and burnt orange leaves that sang and whispered.

Of all the animals that lived on Uzushio they loved the foxes most. Quick and clever creatures that often wore pelts as red as Uzushio sand. The foxes were loyal and devoted to each other and Uzushio would tease them as they played on their beaches, sending waves to nip at their paws and a breeze to tug at their tails.

The plants and animals were Uzushio’s first offspring and each life was precious to the land.

*

Their first children were unique. The winds which came to Uzushio from other lands told of humans growing and settling together. Uzushio’s first children were not humans but each of the nine was unique and precious even if they weren’t as numerous as the humans.

A being came to Uzushio, Hagoromo, and it was on Uzushio that nine beings were born and Hagoromo rested in the heart of Uzushio whilst his newest creations grew.

They learnt and played on Uzushio and Uzushio loved to teach them. They would show Isobu how to navigate the whirlpools and send mist into the air to conceal and warn off the others during games of hide and seek. Isobu loved to play in the kelp forests with the turtles and whales in Uzushio’s oceans.
Chōmei was easy to teach as she soared on the winds Uzushio made and created sparkling clouds inspired by the ruby sands that Uzushio would flick up at her. She learnt how to fly and move from watching the dragonflies that darted on the pools and rivers and from the honeybees that flit from flower to flower and filled the air with a cacophony of buzzing.

Shukaku loved Uzushio’s sands too and Uzushio showed the youngest how to bend and chase his siblings with the grains, how to make them stronger when the others tried to pounce on the youngest (as is the want of older siblings) and how to create replicas of the animals that moved just like those living on Uzushio.

Son Gokū was taught deep within Uzushio itself. At the core of the land -above Uzushio’s beating heart- where the magma still flowed and boiled. The lava roiled and twisted, carving through black rock and forming caverns where the monkey would play and swing and screech whenever his siblings raised his ire.

Kokuō was the flightiest of all Uzushio’s children. Always looking out and across Uzushio’s oceans to the smudge of land where the winds told of great, empty plains calling out to be explored and run across and forests of tall trees where the shadows were dark and cool. Uzushio had no great open expanses and so they taught Kokuō to run on land, air and water and how to harness fire and water to bring life. (Kokuō was the first to leave and Uzushio almost wished they had never taught her how to run).

Matatabi was the most independent one. She would lounge on Uzushio’s cliffs and bask in the sun as it shone down. Uzushio did not need to teach their cat-like child how to use their power and instead they taught her how to care for her siblings, how to love the soil and the animals of Uzushio and respect for all creatures and beings. Uzushio also introduced Matatabi to the Shinigami, so the ghost cat would know when Death was nearby and respect him.

Uzushio found Saiken the sweetest of all their children who delighted in the simplest of things. His bubbly nature would be entranced by the birds building nests on the cliffs, the fox kits playing in the sand, the whales who would sing in the oceans and the dragonflies that darted around and on the surface of the pools and rivers of Uzushio. But Uzushio also showed Saiken how the plants and animals could be vicious, the sharp teeth of the fox, the claws and beaks of the birds, the strength and power of the whales fin, the poison of some of the insects and amphibians, the deadly nature of some of the most beautiful plants.

Saiken would know and understand that sometimes it would be necessary to be deadly (although Uzushio hoped he wouldn’t have to be) and would refuse to use his powers against his siblings.

The eight tails spent most of his time in the depths of Uzushio’s oceans and learning the whirlpools. He was most adept at hiding from Isobu and his younger siblings would whine when the bull-headed octopus sank into the ocean, tired of playing. Uzushio taught Gyūki patience and tolerance for his younger siblings and they watched as gradually Gyūki began to play more and teach is younger siblings how to notice traps and tricks that they and Uzushio would try to play during their games.

Kurama was the most inquisitive of all Uzushio’s children.

He would run with the foxes, skip over the whirlpools and waves chasing the dolphins, sit with his father in Uzushio’s heart and listen to his father tell tales. Kurama would lie in the cherry groves and ask the wind questions, listen to the songs Uzushio sang of the world before his birth, listen to the stories of falling stars, watch light arcing and creating sculptures of twisted glass and ask his siblings questions about their thoughts too.
That wasn’t to say that Kurama was perfect. He always boasted of his strength over his siblings (and Uzushio knew that there was an element of truth to it as Kurama always won the siblings mock battles and play fights) but Kurama was protective of his siblings and could often be found cuddled up with one of them.

When the time came for them all to start leaving and finding their places out in the world Uzushio watched as Hagoromo told them where they were to go. Uzushio created the perfect day for each of them to depart (apart from Matatabi who slunk away in the middle of the night chasing after the Shinigami).

The last of Uzushio’s first children to leave was Kurama and as he left, he thanked Uzushio and named them.

“Mother.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Please kudos and comment! Let me know what you think!

Next Chapter - Uzushio Part Two
The arrival of shinobi on Uzushio, exploration on the clans including the Uzumaki and the Fall of Uzushiogakure...
Uzushio - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Shinobi come to Uzushio and settle. Uzushio watches and loves their human children. Mito and Hashirama seal the tailed beasts and Uzushiogakure falls.

Chapter Notes

See end notes for translations and definitions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Uzushio

(Part Two)

*

When the last of their tailed children left, Uzushio remained alone for a long time. Hagoromo left too, returning to his sons and his disciples. Uzushio waited for his disciples and their descendants to find the land amongst the whirlpools.

When shinobi came, they came tentatively, using chakra to run across Uzushio’s waves and dodge their whirlpools. These shinobi found the red sands and towering red cliffs and scaled them. Shinobi explored the groves of fruit trees, the rivers and pools where the koi lazily swam, the caverns that echoed and whistled as Uzushio’s breeze trickled through the interconnected passages, the highest point where Uzushio’s tailed children had been born and Hagoromo had built a small house to live in and the nine different places where their tailed children had left their shores from.

The shinobi built torii gates leading up to Hagoromo’s house, nine in total, and Uzushio sent a wave of cherry blossoms to bless their construction. The shinobi built more red painted torii at the nine places where their first children had left from; the furthest out into the ocean was Gyūki’s, the innermost on the island where Chōmei had sprang into the air, on the cliffs where Matatabi had leapt from in the night, on the beach where Shukaku had built a vast bridge of red sand, bridging the river from where Isobu had sunk into the kelp forests, guarding the mouth of the ocean cave where Saiken blew a bubble and floated away, carved from the great fallen tree where Son Goku had swung out across the whirlpools, Kokuō’s torii on a sand spit that stretched out between the whirlpools and could only be accessed at low tide and finally Kurama’s torii in the plum tree grove where the great fox had leapt from.

Uzushio loved their children’s torii, it was a permanent reminder of them even if their newest, human children did not understand why they felt so much energy in those places.

*

The shinobi grew and multiplied, bringing with them new descendants and families. Uzumaki were
the first and Uzushio watched as they built a village, red rooftops, white walls and columns covered in twisting marks and spirals adorning multiple buildings. The Uzumaki were strong and clever like the foxes and Uzushio delighted in their fuuinjutsu which used their chakra to create and build and make.

Fuuma clan came with the Uzumaki and whilst less boisterous than the red-headed Uzumaki they built too, smaller, simpler buildings. Fuuma children loved Uzushio’s cliffs and chasing the cherry blossoms and butterflies in their breeze. Uzushio enjoyed tweaking the children’s orange hair with their wind. The Fuuma built ships and crafts that used the wind to skid across the ocean and to dive off the cliffs and soar in the sky.

Next came a clan with darker hair, shades of blue and purple. The Yayoi clan. Some of their children had golden eyes and Uzushio watched the quietest of all their children find the quieter places of Uzushio – the caverns Son Goku had made, the kelp forests where Isobu played, the coral reefs where Kokuō learnt to run. The Yayoi clan made paper and Uzushio loved how they would write on it, describing Uzushio and creating seals. How they folded it, making something Uzushio would learn to know as origami. The Yayoi clan would leave their origami creations at the torii and Uzushio delighted in them.

There were many more clans that came, smaller and less numerous than the Uzumaki, Fuuma and Yayoi but just as beloved by Uzushio.

There was the Shi clan who faced the Shinigami to meet him and not fear him when their time came. They made masks to hide the faces of the shinobi so that when they faced an opponent their opponent knew that Death might be lurking behind the mask. The Shi clan were the most respectful of Uzushio’s new children and their elders built a temple and a cemetery where the dead could be honoured and remembered. Uzushio encouraged wildflowers to grow around the borders of the cemetery and watched as her children picked them to make garlands and crowns for their fallen and departed dead.

Another clan was the Obake. A small group of fearsome shinobi who could, when provoked, summon great amounts of rage and anger and change their bodies to aid them in their fight. Uzushio found it interesting that whilst the Obake could be terrifying they could also be incredibly kind. Uzushio always sent their injured animals to an Obake who would care for the animal before releasing it back to Uzushio. The Obake were also the ones who started the tradition of leaving out inari for the foxes and Uzushio felt the foxes’ pleasure at the treat.

The smallest of all the clans were the Hou-o, silver-haired shinobi who used fuuinjutsu and other tools to heal. They were often some of the cleverest and most inquisitive of Uzushio’s children and there were many times Uzushio had to send a fox guide to lead a lost child out of the caverns, a turtle to guide them back to shore, a gull to stop them venturing too close to the cliff edge or a deer to stop them exploring the mountain’s steep slopes. Hou-o built a hospital that was light and airy, a place for healing and dying that was welcoming and warm. Uzushio surrounded the hospital with herbs and always sent a pleasantly warm breeze to drift through the corridors and rooms bringing the salty smell of the ocean and the sweet blossoms from around the island.

There were more than just shinobi included in Uzushio’s children. Uzushio loved singing with the musicians who played shakuhachi, koto, shamisen and taiko. They learnt about different ways to eat plants and animals from their children who cooked and made interesting dishes like ramen, aburaage, dango, mochi, curry, roasted meat, candied flowers and fruits. They helped the fishermen learn when the best time to navigate the whirlpools was, where the shoals would get trapped, where new whirlpools would spring up and where the best oysters and shellfish could be found. Then there were the children who made things armour and weapons for the shinobi and
those who made brilliant clothing in rich colours. Uzushio adored the bright colours her children were adorned with – trousers, shirts, dresses, kimono and many others in shades of burnt orange, crimson, purple, verdant greens, midnight blues and honey yellows. The dancing children always wore the most fabulous outfits and cavorted and twirled at the festivals. There were even quiet, solemn children who lived at the highest point of Uzushio. Priests and monks who prayed and thought and enjoyed the simplicity of Uzushio. Uzushio sometimes sent a breeze to tug playfully at the bells around the temple and the special shimenawa on the temple’s columns and the torii gates that led up to the shrine.

Uzushio watched and loved as their new children grew and evolved and they named their home *Mother* too.

* 

When Mito Uzumaki left, Uzushio sent her a farewell with the sun shining on the waves and the whirlpools spinning plumes of salt-spray into the air. Gulls, osprey and sea hawks danced in the air above as the boat left the red sands.

The rest of Uzushio’s children were waving coloured silks in farewell and celebrating their sibling’s upcoming union to the Konoha shinobi who had visited.

Uzushio had liked Hashirama. He had been polite to Mito and admired her strength and her skill. He had also been complimentary about Uzushio. It had been easy enough for Uzushio to connect with Hashirama when he meditated in the boughs of a cherry tree. Uzushio had seen his forests and his growing village. Uzushio could tell that Konoha wasn’t alive in the same way as they were but Hashirama could talk to the trees and that was enough for him.

Uzushio was proud of her child Mito and they mourned the permanent departure of another of their children as Mito’s ship passed beneath Gyuuki’s torii.

* 

When Mito helped Hashirama seal Kurama inside herself Uzushio felt Kurama cry out in anger, fury and terror. His scream contained only two words.

*Father*

*Mother*

When Mito sealed Kurama away and then assisted in creating a seal for Uzushio’s other tailed children, Uzushio wept. The sky over the island grew cloudy and stormy and the whirlpools raged and twisted in a way the shinobi and people of Uzushio had never seen before.

Uzushio cried for their nine tailed children who had been unwittingly betrayed by one their human children. For a moment, Uzushio felt a swell of anger before their love for all their children filled them once more and they resolved to wait. Wait for the day when their two different types of children could find a common ground and no longer fear or hate each other.

* 

Uzushio lost more children over the years to Konoha. They could still feel them and sent them dreams of Uzushio’s sands, cliffs, whirlpools and caverns but it was not the same. Konoha took and took from Uzushio and each time Uzushio sent their child away with a display.

Kushina left after being bowed to by the foxes and the plum and cherry blossom filled wind pushed
her ship out into the whirlpools.

None of these losses could compare however to the slaughter of their children on their land.

The Fall of Uzushio was sudden, swift and unprecedented.

Uzushio aided where they could. Seabirds were sent out to harry and peck at the attacking shinobi. Whales, dolphin and shark barged ships that contained the siege weapons that flung flaming tar at the village and cliffs. Crowned stag charged at unsuspecting shinobi on the beaches and in the shadows of the fruit trees. Boar with sharp tusks who grew larger than those on the mainland tore through the shinobi ranks like a kunai through paper. The koi in the rivers and pools made the water too turbulent to stand upon. Uzushio sent the wind to whip and claw at the invaders, the branches and roots of the trees screamed into movement grasping at the interlopers’ limbs and rising to cover Uzushio’s human children from shuriken and senbon that would have otherwise killed.

The foxes led the youngest children into the caverns, deeper than any had ever been before, taking them to the very heart of Uzushio. There the children waited as the foxes left and returned with adults. There they sat until there was no other choice and the few remaining Uzushio shinobi activated the teleportation seal they had brought with them. They lacked energy after their long fight and Uzushio used the last of their own energy to flood the teleportation seal and sent their remaining children across their whirlpools and scattered them among the nations to hide from the invaders.

The fight was ended. Uzushio called to their animals to retreat and hide from the invaders. The wind fell suddenly and the trees and plants which had come to life sank back to their former positions as if they had never moved.

The waves and whirlpools which had been furiously churning and spitting calmed abruptly.

The invaders felt a heavy change in the air as above them clouds gathered, and rain spewed forth. Uzushio screamed as the invaders ransacked their children’s homes, stole from their corpses and damaged village. It was all they could do to show their pain by making the very heavens grieve.

With the last of their strength Uzushio sent out a message to all their children.

*I am undone. My children fallen and my soul invaded... But my whirlpools are here, my oceans, beaches, cliffs, soil and caverns. My self is in you, and you are a part of me. One day I will rise up and find you.*

In the silence left by the departing invaders Uzushio wept and mourned. A Mother no longer.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Please kudos and comment! Let me know what you think!

Translations:
Shinobi – a ninja
Torii – a traditional Japanese gate found at the entrance of or within a Shinto shrine,
marks the transitions from the mundane to the sacred
Fuuma – ‘fuu’ meaning wind or air, ‘ma’ meaning dance
Yayoi – meaning ‘new life’ is the traditional name of the month of March in the
Japanese calendar
Shi – meaning ‘death’
Obake – a class of preternatural creatures in Japanese folklore. Literally means a thing
that changes, referring to a state of transformation or shapeshifting
Hou-o – Japanese for Phoenix. Represents fire, the sun, justice, obedience and fidelity
Shakuhachi – a Japanese bamboo flute
Koto – a Japanese stringed musical instrument, the national instrument of Japan
Shamisen – a three-stringed Japanese lute
Taiko – in Japanese the term refers to any kind of drum
Aburaage – deep fried tofu pouches made from soybeans, in mythology it is the
favourite food of Kitsune and Inari
Dango – dumpling and sweet made from rice flour, related to mochi
Mochi – rice cake made of a short grain rice and other ingredients. The rice is pounded
into paste and moulded into the desired shape
Shimenawa – ‘enclosing rope’, lengths of laid rice straw or hemp rope used for ritual
purification in the Shinto religion. A space bound by shimenawa often indicates a
sacred or pure space.
Uzushio - Part Three

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of the Fall of Uzushigakure. Uzushio rests and makes a decision, creating a mortal form to lay their children to rest.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to those who have given kudos, subscribed and thanks to Yuu_Uchiha for commenting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Uzushio

(Part Three)

* 

After the fall, Uzushio was diminished. It was strange how their children had made them stronger. With the loss of them Uzushio was weakened. Their offspring, the plants and animals slowly recovered, feeling their parent resting below and around them. The foxes became the only ones who dared to venture into the rubble of the village, and they chittered at the bodies that lay strewn amongst the ruins.

As they rested a memory came to Uzushio. One of their shinobi children, an Uzumaki, had sent out a messenger bird. A bird that had made it to Konoha. The attack on Uzushio lasted two days and Konoha did not come. Konoha did not come.

After all the children Uzushio let Konoha take, it was unthinkable that the Village Hidden in the Leaves would forsake them. But they did not come.

* 

Years passed and Uzushio kept all shinobi and all humans away. The whirlpools spun faster and changed position quicker than ever before. A heavy, impenetrable mist lingered above the whirlpools and the wind would snarl and tear at sails if any attempted to bring a boat into Uzushio’s ocean.

Within the barrier Uzushio’s wilderness began to reclaim the island. Vines, grasses and flowers encroaching into the ruined buildings. The boar ran in the forests unafraid of humans as did the deer and the foxes.

The bodies of Uzushio’s human children however remained in a perfect state. Untouched by time, sun, decay.

*
Uzushio regained their strength and made a decision. They would separate their soul and heart, one to remain within the island, sea and wind, the other to take a humanoid form and bury their children.

Within the throbbing, pulsing heart of Uzushio the soul and heart divided. It was a long process and several times they started anew. This was their own birth and they had the time and energy to make a version of themselves. They changed their face, nose, hair, skin colour, height and age time and time again.

They took characteristics from their human children. Uzumaki hair – crimson and blood-red – a shade or two darker than the traditional Uzumaki, the sharp but elegant bones of the Yayoi, the honey-coloured skin of the Obake, the blue eyes of both Hou-o and Uzumaki children, the average height of the Fuuma, the graceful strength of muscle and mind from the Shi clan and the heart from all their children. Finally, all that was left was to choose whether to remain a ‘them’ or to become what their children had named them.

In the end the decision was simple. Their heart would become a she, a Mother, named thus by Kurama the oldest of their children.

She was born gasping for breath, shivering against the breeze and trembling at the sensation on her skin in the heart of Uzushio.

* 

The foxes had known what Uzushio was doing, they had told them after all, and they were there at her birth. The skulk crept forward and encircled her new form with their warmth as her eyes focussed and took in light and dark in a new way. The feeling of fur against her skin was unique and fascinating.

It took a long time for her breathing to slow, her own heartbeat and that of Uzushio’s resounding in her ears. Once it did, she felt the potential for strength and movement in her limbs and she attempted to move. At first, she could only move like the foxes, on all fours, and it was a juddering and ungainly movement like that of a new-born fawn. She persevered with the foxes bolstering and supporting her as they led her up and out of Uzushio’s heart.

The sun made her eyes water and the breeze whipped at her long hair, sending tears and crimson strands soaring into the air. A laugh broke from her chest, a new and wet sound.

The further out from Uzushio’s heart they went the stronger her limbs grew. She remembered how her human children had moved and copied their movements. For being only hours old she was doing well, even if she did need to loop an arm over the back of a stag that had joined in the foxes’ procession towards the ruined village.

Her skin revelled in the sunlight and warm breeze that accompanied them. She felt the ghostly touch of butterflies and dragonflies as they flit by and the pulse of air that came as the seabirds, swallows, swifts and falcon joined their slow parade. The boar joined in too and the sound of their heavy grunts made her smile, a crooked and new expression that made her want to touch her own face to see how it worked.

* 

Eventually the procession reached the village, and all fell silent. Her human children lay where they had fallen. The foxes had removed all remnants of the invaders, all weapons and scraps of clothing had been taken from the village and the surrounding area and tossed into the ocean where
the turtles, octopus and other sea creatures had all too eagerly taken them to the depths where they let them sink down to be crushed by Uzushio’s ocean.

She knew what her first task was to be and asked for her offspring’s assistance.

*

It was a seemingly unending task that was only made easier by her animal’s aid. The cemetery her Shi children had built began to fill at a sickening rate.

The boar and deer would wait patiently as she lifted the bodies of her human children onto their backs. Then they proceeded to carefully, delicately, carry them to the cemetery.

The first hundred or so graves were filled with the youngest of her human children. The ones who hadn’t managed to escape the purge and find a fox to lead them to the sanctuary of Uzushio’s heart. She dug graves out with her bare hands, feeling the soil part easily beneath her fingers and nails, coating her skin with the red soil. Each baby or young one was lain on their side, curled up as if they were asleep, their hands resting next to their heart.

Tears poured down her cheeks as the animals nudged the soil back down. Her ears heard the soft thuds as the soil interned their bodies and she felt sobs swell up from her belly and pour from her throat.

The birds had ventured into the Yayoi clan’s homes and found the special paper that would take centuries to degrade. It was designed to be used for long term barriers and defences (there had been seals upon ones around the perimeter of the village, but they had been weakened by the invaders and eventually failed).

She used a pot of mahogany coloured ink and a soft brush to carefully stroke down the name of the child buried below the mound of earth. She knew them all. They had all been named upon her land and she remembered their birth, naming and death. It took a small pulse of energy as she placed the paper on the grave and the child within was named, known and returned to the land of their birth. None would be able to remove the seal, nor desecrate the grave.

Over and over and over and over she repeated her actions. Lifting her children carefully onto the boar and deer, digging their grave with her bare hands, laying them to rest on their sides. Some she buried together, husbands and wives, siblings. The oldest Uzumaki couple, with their hair still a brilliant red, she laid to rest with their foreheads pressed together and their hands entwined.

*

It took her weeks to recover all her human children. The birds helped by finding the shinobi who had fallen beyond the village perimeter. They circled overhead to guide her to her children, aiding in one of the only ways they could.

She rested when she needed too, whether it was the middle of the day, the early hours of the morning or the setting of the sun. Her body required food now which was a new sensation. The foxes brought her fruit from the trees and the sea hawks and gulls brought her fish from the ocean. She remembered how to prepare it from watching generations of her human children who sailed between the whirlpools chasing shoals of fish.

Eventually the last body was laid down, the first shinobi to fall, the one who had been silenced whilst raising the alarm of the invasion. She spent some time at his grave and found her tears still flowing as she painted his name on the paper and sealed him to his rest.
The Shi cemetery had not been empty when she began but now there were thousands of bodies laid
to rest. Thousands of graves that only she would know and thousands of names only she and her
lost human children would ever know.

The foxes had not been idle whilst she buried her human children. They had carefully gathered
flowers and placed them on the mounds. As the sun began to rise she spoke to Uzushio’s soul, the
part that remained within the soil, water and air and together their soul and heart worked to embed
the flowers within the soil so that each grave would be marked by a name and a plume of
blossoms.

*

When she had laid her last human child to rest and marked all their graves, she left the cemetery
and made her way down to her sea. She crossed the red sands and sank down into the waves that
had been warmed by the sun.

In her oceans she washed the soil and blood of her children from her skin and hair and her tears
finally ceased as they were absorbed into her whirlpools and waves.

She lay on her back and let her waves rock her gently, easing the strain and throbbing ache she felt
in her arms, back and legs.

She felt her soul rest too. Land and body eased by their children’s return to the soil. A grieving
mother who had laid their many, many children to sleep.

Mother no longer on the island of Uzushio, for there were no children or beings left to name them
or her such.

*

Chapter End Notes

Please be kind, kudos and comment!

Next Chapter: Uzushio - Part Four

Uzushio tidies up the village, finds some clothes and vows to find all her lost children.
Uzushio - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Uzushio finishes tidying up the village and takes a few items with her from the main clans. She sets out on her journey to find her lost children.

Chapter Notes

Uzushio's clothing was inspired by Kubo's mother from Kubo and the Two Strings and the robes worn by Kaguya in Studio Ghibli's The Tales of Princess Kaguya. Check them out if you want a visual aid!

Please kudos and comment! Let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Uzushio

(Part Four)

* 

When she had rested and washed away the remnants of her toil from her flesh she returned to the village. There she began to return the items that had been left behind during the invasion by her children.

Ink pots, brushes, shamisen, seals, swords, kunai, taiko, shuriken, dolls, senbon, headbands, shoes, clothing, bells, hairpins and toys that lay abandoned in the streets. She gathered them all up and returned them to the home of the child they belonged too.

If the house was utterly destroyed, she left them in front of the building, an additional memorial to her children. There were many such memorials by the time she finished.

As she went about her work, she noticed many things missing. Scrolls containing the sacred jutsu of many of the clans and shinobi, weapons that had been unique to her children, armour and clothing that had been imbued with seals to protect the wearer, even small items such as hairpins and bells that used to adorn the hair of Uzumaki, Fuuma, Shi, Obake, Yayoi and Hou-o alike.

* 

When she realised this, she began to make a list. She noted down each item that was missing and she knew whether it had been salvaged by one of her fleeing children who had managed to escape via the transportation seal or stolen by one of the invading shinobi.

Even the temple on the site where her tailed children had been born had been ransacked. The shimenwa on the torii gates had been callously slashed and lay in strands around the base of the columns. Within the temple the scrolls which told of Uzushio’s history had been torn up, ripped,
desecrated and tossed aside.

The innermost sanctuary had been defiled too. The priests who built the shrine had found a staff that had been worn down and a tea set that had survived the ages. They had cherished these as disciples of Hagoromo and eventually set them into the innermost sanctuary to be kept as a reminder of Hagoromo (even if they did not understand that Uzushio had been Hagoromo’s home for many months, nor did they know that the Bijuu had been born on Uzushio).

She shook when she entered the sanctuary and found the tea set smashed, shards of pottery cutting into her bare feet. The staff was long gone, taken by a shinobi who thought it’s value lay in some mysterious power (never considering that it’s true value was that it had been chosen from one of Uzushio’s trees to help Hagoromo move about after his creation of his last tailed children).

Her heart grew strong with the decision that floated at the edge of her mind. She would leave Uzushio, her soul, her island, her waves, her whirlpools, breeze, caves, trees, animals, cliffs and beaches and she would go out into the world to reclaim the treasures stolen by the invaders and to find her long lost children and invite them home once more.

She missed her children dearly and whilst she knew the village would not be the same it was in her nature to evolve and grow and she wished for her children to return and create something new out of the ashes of their fall.

*

There were some parts of the village that had been left intact by the invading shinobi. Hidden places within the clan lands. She knew they had been left alone because the barrier seals which protected them were intact.

First, she visited the Obake shrine where their precious items were sealed. Within she chose garments which were specially created to last against intense wear. Her Obake children had gone through clothing quickly until they learnt to use the seals to strength the cloth and armour against weapons, weather and time. And Obake clothing was both strong and beautiful.

Soft cotton undergarments were placed closest to her skin and covered with a red silk kosode which fell to her calves. Next, she slid into a Hitoe in a blue-green colour that reminded her of the koi that swam in her rivers. A larger and longer garment (her memories called it an itsutsuginu) in a crimson silk came next and was then topped by a deep purple version that was embroidered with gold silk butterflies, foxes and swirls. A burnt orange and crimson Karaginu came next and lastly a Mo – the white train that trailed atop and behind the layers and was embroidered with red acer leaves, cherry and plum blossoms and koi.

She knew there were supposed to be more layers (traditionally twelve) but she wanted to be able to move swiftly if necessary, during her travels. She took other garments from the Obake shrine too; kimono, hakama, yukata and obi as well as shinobi clothing such as strengthened trousers, shirts, mesh shirts and armour plates. All of these she sealed into a storage scroll before drawing the seal for storage on her left arm and letting the scroll sink into the seal that was now part of her.

Next, she visited the Hou-o shrine and borrowed some of their medical texts. Whilst she remembered everything that her children had ever learnt, spoken, said, taught or done she would like to have some of the information available to share with any of her Hou-o children if she found them.

From the Yayoi shrine she took several brushes which could stand large amounts of chakra infusion, scrolls with special papers sealed within and a book of Yayoi origami patterns and
instructions. Some of her more gifted Yayoi children had been able to use their origami creations as a shinobi tool, bringing the paper creations to life.

Fuuma shrine contained the best weapons and some ranged from the obscenely large and heavy (which her new body would not be able to lift) to the most delicate and thin senbon. Some of the Fuuma weapons were designed to be unnoticeable and from these she selected a parasol, a fan and a wakizashi. The fan she slipped into the sleeve of her clothing but the parasol and wakizashi were sealed away onto her left arm in a new sealing mark, just as the Yayoi and Hou-o items had been.

The penultimate shrine she visited was the Uzumaki shrine. From there she took a book of seals, one that had been started by the first Uzumaki and continued and added to by generations of Uzumaki. This precious item went into a seal on her right arm. She also found a hairpin that she used to pin part of her long hair up, a black metal stick with a cascade of tiny black bells that rang as she moved. The sound reminded her of the bells used during festivals and prayers by the miko. A secondary hairpin with shells and origami cranes threaded onto black silk assisted with the style.

* 

Before visiting the last clan’s shrine, she wandered amongst the homes of her non-shinobi children. The dancers, cloth-makers, food creators, metal workers, fishermen, healers, musicians. Whilst she knew she would be able to train this body to fight like a shinobi, (like an Uzumaki, a Fuuma, a Yayoi, a Hou-o, an Obake, a Shi) she did not wish to travel and kill like her children had.

She had found a shamisen when tidying the village. The strings and skin had perished but the wood frame was intact, marked with a tiny Uzumaki swirl by the pegs, and the bachi made of tortoiseshell and wood was undamaged. A pouch of silk strings had remarkably survived the invasion and long years after and she slipped these into the sleeve beside the fan. She would have to wait until she was on the mainland to get the shamisen re-skinned and to that end, she picked up a pouch of money from the same house.

She would replenish the money through playing on her travels. After all, she hoped humans would be more generous and less suspicious of a wandering musician and thus more likely to tell her about the thieves who had slaughtered her children and stolen their belongings.

* 

The last shrine she visited was the Shi clans. Stepping into the shrine she felt the cool touch of the Shinigami. The masks of the Shi clan stared back at her from the darkness and she reached out to select a mask. Her soul pulsed from within Uzushio’s soil and combined with her heart she chose a mask.

Her eyes closed as she placed the cool porcelain against her skin. Once the mask was snug against the lines of her face, she opened her eyes and saw the Shinigami staring at her.

“It has been a while since one of my masks was chosen.” The Shinigami murmured. “And you are not one of the Shi, nor indeed one of the Uzushio humans. Nor are you afraid. Name yourself.”

She had not spoken before, not to the animals, wind, waves, trees, whirlpools, sands, cliffs, caverns or graves. Her voice was soft and reserved and the Shinigami heard echoes of her earliest life when she spoke.

“I am Uzushio.”

“Hmm. Not all of Uzushio. You have split yourself in two.”
“I am Uzushio. I am Mother. I am here and I am the essence which surrounds us. I am Uzushio as They are Uzushio.”

“Very well. Uzushio I see you. You are known to the Shinigami. There will be an end to this body, and I will be there at that end. But you, I think, will not come with me. You are Uzushio.”

Uzushio, named and recognised by the Shinigami, bowed to Death and Death bowed back.

“I wish you luck in finding your children, Uzushio, Mother of many.”

*

Newly named Uzushio wandered down the overgrown paths were so many of her children had walked. The wind teased her long hair, tickling the bells of her hairpin and making them sing. The cherry blossoms scented the air and reminded her of all the fallen children who she would be leaving in the care of her soul.

Stepping down onto the beach she held her footwear in her left hand. Okobo geta lacquered black with red hanao. She would start wearing them once she had left her soil, sands and waves behind. For now, she wanted to feel herself beneath her feet.

The sun was setting, and she watched with eager eyes as the sky high above turned purple fading into blue, orange, red and the waters giggling and racing below were stained similar colours. She heard the voice of Uzushio, just as Kushina, Mito, Kurama, Gyūki, Chōmei, Saiken, Kokūō, Son Goku, Isobu, Matatabi, Shukaku and so many others had. A voice of memory, wind, wave, sand, soil and time carried that quivered with anticipation.

I wish you well Uzushio. May you find our children and bring them home. We are less without them.

“Guard us well Uzushio. If you have need of me call and I will return. We will be Mother - Uzushio again.”

The heart of Uzushio bid farewell to the soul that remained, and she danced across the waves and whirlpools, a mother looking for her children. She did not know which she would find, tailed or human but she would not stop until all (those who tugged at her heart and called for whispers of their home) were found.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter - Yugito Part One:
Uzushio arrives in Kumo and makes friends with a certain young girl. Secrets are revealed.

Translation:
Uzushio’s clothing is based on:
Junihitoe – a style of formal court dress first worn during the Heian period. Translates literally as ‘twelve layers’
The following are the layers used in ITAV, not all of the twelve layers are used:
Kosode – a short silk red or white robe of ankle or lower calf length
Hitoe – An unlined silk robe; usually red, white or blue-green
Itsutsuginu – A series of brightly coloured robes, usually 5 or sometimes 6 which
create a layered effect
Karaginu – A waist length Chinese style jacket
Mo – An apron-like train down the back of the robe. White with painted or
embroidered adornments
Further Translations:
Kimono – a long robe with wide sleeves traditionally worn as an outer garment
Hakama – traditional Japanese skirt-like trousers
Yukata – a more casual version of the Kimono, usually made out of cotton
Obi – a broad sash worn around the waist of a Kimono
Okobo – also known as pokkuri, bokkuri or koppori geta from the sound made when
walking, are wooden sandals, usually five to six inches tall
Hanao – sandal or geta strap
Wakizashi – a Japanese sword shorter than a kanata
Miko – a shrine maiden or priestess
Shamisen – a traditional Japanese three-stringed lute with a square body, played with a
large plectrum
Bachi – a large plectrum used to play the shamisen
Yugito - Part One

Chapter Summary

Uzushio reaches Kumo and makes friends with a certain young girl and certain feline Bijuu! There is tea and mochi here!

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! Please keep letting me know what you think!

Also, follow me on my new Instagram to get updates and random thoughts!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yugito

(Part One)

*

Uzushio made her way through the mainland. She had her shamisen reskinned and when walking along the road practised plucking, strumming and forming the correct positions to create the right pitch, sound and melody.

She earnt money in the small villages by sitting on a bench outside a tea house and playing. She knew old songs, ones that hadn’t been heard in an age at least, ones that had been lost with Uzushio’s fall.

She never lingered long. Long enough to earn money for a room at an inn or for a meal. Long enough to listen for whispers of her children. Long enough to learn more about the humans of the mainland. Long enough to see how shinobi were watched in the smaller villages. Long enough to watch human children grow confident and bold enough to sit beside her or at her feet.

She never gave out her name but remembered for a time, for her trailing robes, crimson hair and shamisen.

Uzushio heard the civilians talk of the shinobi war that was raging on and was often warned away from battlefields and fights by farmers or other travellers. She wandered seemingly aimlessly until her heart began to call her towards the Land of Lightning. She could feel one of her children and some of the treasures of her children, a fleeting presence but enough.

*

Yugito lay face down on the ground and panted harshly.

“Is that it? Are you done Yugito-chan?” Her instructor’s voice mocked her.
She had run the course beyond count now. She was tired and Matatabi was growling in her head. Yugito pressed her sweaty palms into the dirt once more and pushed up on trembling arms. Her blonde hair had long since begun to escape from its confines, but she dared not push it away from her sweat-soaked face. The last time she had done that there were threats to shave it all off.

There were not many things Yugito had left that were precious to her. Her belongings had all been taken from her after the sealing of the Nibi. Her mother was long since gone from this world and Yugito only had faint memories of her mother. Of blue eyes and long blonde hair. If her hair was the last thing she had left of her mother, she would hold onto it with all she had.

She swayed as she managed to rise to her feet. This would be the last time she could run the training course today; she could feel it in her throbbing muscles and see the way her vision blurred with weariness.

“Move!” Her instructor snarled and instinct sent her leaping away on all fours from the kunai that embedded themselves in the ground where she had been.

Yugito used chakra to cling to the wall and dodged the various attacks her other instructors threw at her. The attacks ranged from weapons, taijutsu, ninjutsu and genjutsu and they were unrelenting. Her breath was coming in sharp whistles now and she could just about make out the safe zone at the end of the course. If she reached it she would win.

Dizziness slammed into her suddenly and she heard Matatabi cry out in her head as the ground rushed towards her.

“Kitten!” Matatabi called and Yugito found the strength to raise her arms and block the kick that came her way as she fell. The force of the blow sent her slamming into a rock and she yelped as her back hit hard and pain throbbed along her spine.

She collapsed on the ground and felt her lungs wheeze as they tried to suck in air after that blow. Her arms throbbed and pulsed, she would feel the bruises later that night even with Matatabi healing her.

Sandaled feet stopped in front of her hazy vision and a hand reached down to pull her up by her hair. Yugito snarled weakly and if she had, had the strength she would have clawed at her instructor’s arm. As it was, she could only hang weakly from his grasp and glare hazily at his cold brown eyes.

“We will continue this when you return from Kumo. Do not expect any reprieve.”

A thrill of elation filled her. Tomorrow was the one day a month she did not have to train. When she was allowed (with her watchers following) to go into Kumo and buy new clothes, weapons and spend the day wandering around the village she was supposed to be training to protect. Last time she had been, there had been a new sweet in one of the tea shops and she was eager to try it.

She was dropped back onto the dirt and once she had been left alone (except for her permanent watchers) she rolled onto her back and stared up at the sky.

“Kitten? You alright?”

She didn’t reply to Matatabi, because she wasn’t really sure what ‘alright’ was.

*  

Whilst she loved having the day off from training, Yugito could never forget how it felt to walk...
through Kumo and have her people watching her at a distance. The civilians and shinobi never spoke to her unless she addressed them, and they would follow her path with respectful but wary eyes.

There was always a space around her too. Even in the thickest crowd. As if everyone could sense Matatabi and the agreed upon safe distance was two feet.

She had bought a replacement shirt as one of her training shirts had been too heavily stained with blood to be salvaged and was wandering down a quieter street towards her favourite tea shop when she heard the music.

Her ears pricked up.

“I’ve never heard that song before.” She murmured softly.

“Me neither.” Matatabi purred.

Yugito trotted along with her package tucked under her arm, weaving her way around other shoppers who startled at her presence. She skidded to a halt across the street from her favourite tea shop and her eyes widened in amazement.

“How is her hair so red?” Yugito asked but Matatabi had fallen silent.

The woman was sat on low bench outside the tea shop, a cup of tea and plate of mochi at her side. Her long robes were draped along the bench, up off the ground and away from the dirt of the street, and she had crossed her legs with one foot balanced on her okobo. Her fingers were flying over the strings of her shamisen and her head was bowed down slightly as she played.

It was her hair that most amazed Yugito however. Long, crimson strands, some half-pinned up by sticks but most loose and lying down over her shoulder and just kissing the ground. Yugito felt a cat-like urge to pounce on the strands and play with them.

Slowly, tentatively, like a suspicious cat, Yugito crept closer to the woman who played on. Even when she was standing right in front of the musician Yugito remained wary. She was entranced but there was something different about this woman, something that had made Matatabi (who whilst not a chatterbox usually) fall completely silent.

Eventually the women’s song came to an end and she lifted her head up at the sound of people tossing coins into the scarf she had laid at her feet.

Yugito felt something jolt inside her when the woman’s eyes met hers.

The red head smiled softly at Yugito.

The little girl licked her lips before introducing herself.

“I’m Yugito. Who are you?”

The woman chuckled and laid her shamisen across her lap.

“Hmm, I suppose you can call me Uzu. Nice to meet you Yugito-chan. Would you like to sit with me?”

Yugito bit her lip nervously before nodding. Uzu-san shuffled along the bench slightly, pulling her robes and Mo off the bench to allow Yugito to sit. Once the young girl was seated Uzu-san waved
at a shop worker who scampered over.

“How can I help?” The young shop girl bowed to Uzu and Yugito but remained the usual two feet away from Yugito.

Yugito felt a flush blossom on her cheeks as the shop girl darted looks at her and the strange red-head woman.

“Can I get another portion of sakura mochi and a pot of green tea?” Uzu-san held out some coins and the shop girl was forced to step forward to take the payment. Yugito shifted as if to offer her own money, she had enough after all, but Uzu-san smiled and thanked the shop girl before she could.

“I have money.”

Uzu-san looked down at her and offered a warmer smile than that she had given to the shop girl.

“But I invited you to join me, thus it is my treat. Besides, you should use your money on things you like Yugito-chan.”

“I don’t really like anything.” She murmured.

“Nothing at all?”

They were interrupted by the skittish worker bringing their plate of mochi and a pot of tea with two cups. Yugito took one of the mochi and slowly munched on it as she watched Uzu-san gracefully pull her long sleeve over her hand and lifting the tea pot to pour the warm liquid out.

“I do not have time for hobbies or activities. I have to train.”

“Oh, you are training to be a shinobi?”

Yugito nodded and took another mochi.

“That is an admirable goal. Why did you decide to become a shinobi?”

“I didn’t. I must become a shinobi. I am a tool for the village.”

Uzu-san seemed to smile more sadly at Yugito’s answer, and the young girl felt a sudden desire to see the woman smile again.

“Are you a geisha Uzu-san? You aren’t from Kumo are you?”

“No, I’m not a geisha. I am just a travelling musician. And you’re right – I am not of Kumo.”

“Why are you a travelling musician? Wouldn’t you like to have a home somewhere?”

“Hmm, I have a home and I will go back one day. Now however, I am looking for my children.”

Yugito felt Matatabi perk up. She was intrigued too. As far she knew, her mother had no other children and sometimes (in the darkest times of the night, after training that had left her body aching and tears of pain rolling down her cheeks) Yugito wished for siblings, her mother or at the very least a friend.

“How many children do you have?”
Uzu-san leaned down to rest her elbow on her crossed leg and her chin fell into her hand. The bells in her hair tinkled as she moved to stare up at the cloudy sky.

“Well, I have many, many children. Some of them are gone though and resting in the soil of their home. Others were forced to flee their home and I am looking for them or their children. My first children however all left their home willingly. They were sent out into the world to explore, learn and protect special places. They have been gone the longest.”

Yugito sipped her tea and stared eagerly at Uzu-san. The woman tilted her head in her hand to look at the young girl’s curious face.

“My first children were all vastly different. The oldest was grumpy but strong, the youngest loved to play with sand.”

“How many were there?”

“Nine.”

Matatabi seemed to grow even more curious and Yugito felt her chest swelling with a hope that wasn’t her own.

“Did you have any daughters? What were they called?”

“I had three daughters. The youngest…” Uzu-san paused and stared intently at Yugito.

The blonde girl held her breath, anticipation for the name making her heart race. Uzu-san leaned over to whisper in her ear, crimson hair falling like a curtain, obscuring her mouth from any watcher.

“The youngest was called Matatabi.” The whisper was almost soundless but Yugito and the Bijuu sealed inside her heard it clearly.

Matatabi cried out in Yugito’s mind, a mixture of euphoria and longing,

“Mother!”

*

Chapter End Notes

Whenever I put food in a story I make myself hungry... Mmm mochi.

Next chapter - Yugito Part Two: In which there is tea drinking, contemplative shamisen and Matatabi just wants to curl up around Yugito and protect her.
Chapter Summary

Yugito asks some questions, is given a gift and has to say goodbye. Matatabi makes a vow.

Chapter Notes

Thanks once again for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! Are there any particular pairings people would be interested in? I will say that I do not intend for Uzu to be in a romantic relationship.

When Uzu is playing whilst they drink tea I heard Monkey's story from Kubo and The Two Strings. Love that piece of music https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zn7S34jWS5Y

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yugito

(Part Two)

Inside her head, Matatabi was purring and yowling. It was a series of sounds Yugito had never heard the Nibi make before.

Uzu-san leaned back but remained close. There was hint of mischief in her ocean blue eyes and a knowing tilt to her smile.

“You’re really – the Nibi’s – I mean…” Yugito trailed off. “Nibi called you Mother.”

There was slight widening of the woman’s eyes at this news. She retreated away from Yugito to pick up her teacup and sip at the soothing beverage. Yugito watched her suspiciously.

“Are you not her Mother?”

“Well, my oldest child called me that when he left. But he was the last to leave and none of the other eight ever referred to me as such.”

Yugito frowned.

“I don’t understand.”

Uzu-san sipped her tea and stared at the clouds again.

“Drink your tea, it’ll get cold.”
Lips pursed Yugito picked up the cup in both hands and felt the warmth sooth her battered fingers that still ached despite Matatabi’s healing.

“Matatabi’s oldest brother was the only one who ever called me Mother. When they were born, I was not the way you see me now. So, I am their Mother, but I never expected Matatabi to call me that.”

The little girl drank her tea and ate another sakura mochi. Inside her head she felt and heard Matatabi settle. The euphoria was wearing off and now only the longing remained. It made Yugito feel sad.

Uzu-san finished her tea and returned the cup to the bench. She picked up her shamisen and began to play a slow, contemplative melody. People passing by would slow to listen and the odd person added coins to the wrap laid down in front of them.

“I still don’t understand.” Yugito finally burst out.

Uzu-san laughed and continued playing.

“I’m afraid I can’t explain it more. Not here.”

Yugito pouted and crossed her arms.

“I’ll ask Nibi to explain.”

“You can do. Although she wasn’t around when I became the way I am so she might not know how to explain it all.”

“Well can you explain it more?”

Uzu-san shook her head slowly, the bells ringing and catching Yugito’s attention. Her bruised hands itched to bury themselves in the older woman’s hair. Matatabi laughed at the idea and Yugito hissed at her inside her head.

The young girl’s attention was suddenly captured as one of her watchers left their hiding place to come and stand in front of them.

“It is time to return Yugito-san.” The masked watcher said and bowed slightly.

Yugito felt her heart drop. Matatabi stopped purring too.

“But – I – can’t I –” She leapt to her feet and spluttered.

The masked watcher stayed silent but did not leave. Yugito felt her head tip forward and her hair, which she had left loose for her trip, fell down to conceal the frustrated tears and almost grieving expression that had suddenly twisted her face.

“Fine but leave me alone to say goodbye – please.” She requested and the watcher waited a few seconds before disappearing back into their hiding place.

Matatabi whimpered and curled up inside her mind. Yugito wanted to do that too.

“Now, now Yugito-chan. Lift up your head, let me see those curious eyes.” Uzu-san’s voice rang out above her head.

Yugito tilted her head up, almost defiantly.
Uzushio’s heart ached at the tears welling up in the young girl’s eyes. She knew these weren’t just Yugito’s tears but Matatabi’s too.

“Will you be here in a month’s time?” Yugito pleaded.

“I’m afraid not.”

“Can you come back? I want to talk to you again, and so does…”

Uzu-san leaned forward again and Yugito watched the crimson fall of hair conceal them both.

“I will come and visit you Yugito-chan. Don’t worry, I found Matatabi and she is my child, so that makes you mine too. And a Mother doesn’t leave her child at the first obstacle.”

Yugito’s eyes widened.

“But- how?”

Uzu-san smiled and pulled a pretty hair clip from her deep sleeve. It was a simple black metal pin adorned with a purple paper butterfly. The woman carefully carded back Yugito’s hair (the little girl couldn’t remember the last time someone touched her so gently and with such care) before pinning her fringe up out of her eyes.

“Now I can see that pretty face. You can keep the pin Yugito-chan. It suits you.”

The little girl stared up at the woman.

“Now, we have to say farewell do we not? You mustn’t disappoint your teachers and be late back.”

Uzu-san stepped back, her okobo clicking on the ground. The older woman bowed to Yugito and the little girl bowed back.

“It was lovely to meet you Yugito-chan, I hope we can meet again soon.”

Yugito watched Uzu-san smile again. The watcher returned and wistfully Yugito began to walk away, glancing back over her shoulder only once to see Uzu-san watching her leave.

* * *

“Will I see Uzu-san again Matatabi?” Yugito asked the ghostly cat as she lay curled up on her bed in the middle of the night.

Her watchers had led her back to her training grounds and spoken briefly with her main caretaker. They had all been watching her carefully for the rest of the afternoon as she quietly read a book and ate her dinner. She had been careful not to show further distress or interest in Uzu-san and their interaction. Knowing her instructors as she did, they would use the woman and their meeting to try and provoke a reaction from her. But Yugito and Matatabi would not let them.

“Mother said you would.” Matatabi purred comfortingly.

“Can you tell me how Uzu-san is your Mother?”

Matatabi rolled onto her side in Yugito’s mind and the little girl’s mental form sank down to nestle against the gigantic feline. Her ghostly flames had comforted her more than once.

“I wasn’t born the way you were kitten. I am pure chakra given a body. My father was the one who
made me and my siblings, and we were born on an island. That island was later named Uzushio by the shinobi and humans who settled there.”

Yugito sank deeper into Matatabi’s fur.

“The island, oceans, wind and whirlpools were all alive with an intelligence. That intelligence was Mother. We all thought of Uzushio as our Mother but I’m afraid only my oldest brother ever called her that. The rest of us were too busy thinking of other lands.”

“Did you love her?”

“Mrrow. I think I did. Uzushio cared for us, taught us, guided us and was a safe place for us to grow up in. I always wanted to go back and tell Mother about the things I had seen and done but…”

“But you were sealed into a human before you could?”

Matatabi nodded and they both fell silent.

Yugito blinked slowly, watching the ghost flames that made up Nibi’s fur flicker and shift.

“She must have been lonely once you left.” The little girl murmured.

Matatabi flinched in shock and stared down at her young Jinchurukki. Yugito patted her leg comfortingly.

“I miss my okaa-san. So I think your okaa-san must have missed you too Matatabi.”

“I missed her.” Matatabi rumbled softly. “I never expected to see her again, especially as a squishy human.”

“We’re not squishy.” Yugito protested weakly as sleep tugged at her.

“Yes, you are. Squishy little humans. And you need to rest. We have training tomorrow.”

Yugito fell silent and Matatabi thought she had fallen asleep.

“Matatabi?”

“Yes, kitten?”

“I don’t want to be a tool or a weapon. Do you think Uzu-san would treat us like a weapon?”

“No kitten. Mother would never do that to us.”

“I’m glad. I’m happy you have an okaa-san who loves you. Will you try and leave me now?”

The Nibi recoiled in horror.

“No Yugito! You and I are bound together, and I cannot leave you. Even if I could leave your body without hurting you, I would take you with me. You are my kitten, my Jinchuruuki and I am not leaving you.”

“Thanks, Matatabi.”

Yugito finally fell into a sad slumber. Matatabi stayed awake and began to think. Maybe, just
maybe she and Yugito could try something dangerous if Mother came to find them. Because neither of them had ever wanted to be weapons and Matatabi knew Mother would help her protect Yugito.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Yugito Part Three:
Yugito gets a visitor, there is more tea drinking and Matatabi pushes for freedom.
Yugito - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Yugito gets a visitor. There is also more tea drinking.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! Please let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yugito

(Part Three)

* 

It had been three days since Yugito and Matatabi had met Uzu-san. Matatabi was even quieter than usual, even during Yugito’s training sessions when the cat would normally mutter under her breath about eviscerating the instructors.

The second day after meeting Uzu-san had been unusual. Her teachers were on edge and Yugito had heard them talking (when they thought she couldn’t hear) about artefacts that had been stolen and gone missing from the Raikage’s office. One of her instructors said that there was no trace of an intruder. No one suspicious had entered Kumogakure, no one had seen the intruder and the thief had left no trace of their skullduggery.

Yugito wondered what had been taken but was soon distracted as her training continued.

In the quiet times, when Yugito was allowed to rest and sleep, Matatabi told her Jinchūriki about Uzushio. Yugito fell asleep curled up against Matatabi’s cool flames, dreaming about great red cliffs, soaring white gulls and soft pink cherry blossoms floating through the air.

Gradually Yugito became aware of a new sensation. A longing for a place she had never been, a homesickness and a feeling of loss. She had never felt so deeply about Kumo.

On the fourth night since meeting Uzu-san something different happened. Yugito had been training as hard as usual and had been left alone by her trainers to care for her wounds and sleep. Food had been brought to her on a tray as usual and then her caretaker had said goodnight and left. The small hut where Yugito lived was watched from a distance by a team of watchers but no one ever stayed in her small hut and she was left alone until morning.

The little girl had just finished wiping the blood from her split lip when there was a small gust of air as the window to the bathroom was opened. Yugito leapt backwards, tumbling off the step stool she used to reach the sink and mirror but before she could hit the ground she was cradled in warm
arms and could see crimson hair floating in front of her face.

“Sorry Yugito-chan. I did not mean to surprise you.” Uzu-san said as she placed the girl back on her feet.

Yugito stared up at Uzu-san in bewilderment.

“How – how did you know where to find me?”

Uzu-san smiled and tapped lightly on the purple origami butterfly that was pinning her fringe back. Yugito’s hand trembled as she pulled the clip out and looked at it.

“That is one of my origami creatures. There’s a tiny fragment of my chakra in it. I can find it anywhere in the world. Besides, I would have looked all over Kumo to find you. I said we would meet again did I not?”

* Matatabi purred deeply in Yugito’s head and wrapped Yugito in a warm embrace.

“I said Mother would be back.”

“Smug cat.” Yugito retorted.

Uzu-san reached out slowly to cup Yugito’s chin in her hand. Yugito fought the urge to squirm as Uzu’s eyes took in the bruises, cuts and scrapes that marred her skin. The split lip was the worst, but the black eye came in at a close second. The flesh around both injuries was tender and Matatabi had already told her that the black eye was sorer than normal because her bone had fractured slightly.

A small moue of displeasure formed on Uzu-san’s lip and Yugito couldn’t understand why.

“I’ve had worse.” She offered.

That didn’t make things better as Uzu-san frown deepened.

“Why is she upset?” Yugito asked Matatabi.

“Because children shouldn’t ever be black and blue from wounds. The only time a child should ever be injured is from playing.”

“But I’m supposed to be a ninja, a weapon…”

“That is why Mother is upset. She doesn’t think children should ever be treated as weapons.”

Uzu-san released Yugito’s chin and held her hand over the black eye. A slow, pulsing warmth hovered over her wounded eye and Yugito had to close both eyes at the golden chakra that was throbbing and sending waves of comfort over her body.

“All healed.” Uzu-san said and Yugito opened her eyes. Her fingers reached up and tentatively touched her eye, expecting the swollen area to send a stab of pain at the contact. Smooth and cool skin met her touch, as if the wound had never happened.

She scampered onto the step stool to look in the mirror. All her injuries were gone.

*
Yugito turned to look at Uzu-san with wonder and felt warmth in her belly at the kind smile the red head was showing.

“Thank you, Uzu-san.”

“Of course, kitten. You didn’t need to keep those wounds and I can tell Matatabi used up a lot of energy healing you earlier.”

Yugito still didn’t really understand why Uzu-san was being so kind. Her instructors had said that kindness was a weakness. But Uzu-san was not acting like kindness was weak.

“Would you like some tea?” Yugito led the way out of her bathroom to the main room of her hut. She had a small fire pit in the centre where she could make simple dishes in a large pot and boil water in the heavy kettle. Her futon was laid out at a safe distance from the fire and she had a few cushions to sit on. She had never had a guest before and wondered what it would be like to have someone sitting on a cushion, not just her and the Bijuu in her head.

“If you like.” Uzu-san said. Yugito scurried to her water barrel that sat near the front door and ladled water into her kettle.

When she turned around the red head woman was looking around at Yugito’s hut. The girl wondered what she was looking at. She had kept her small hut tidy, after all it was where she lived, and a ninja must be organised.

Yugito placed her kettle over the fire and looked around at her hut. Everything was in its place. Her clothes were neatly stacked on the shelves, her scrolls and books were carefully piled up and her futon and cushions were laid out. Her small treasures (the ones she had been allowed to keep) were displayed on the top of the small cupboard where she kept her food items. Her hairbrush, a purple ribbon, a sparkling rock she had used as a weapon during a training session and a small cat toy she had made from scraps from her worn clothing.

Uzu-san turned her gaze back to Yugito who was now knelt upright on one of her cushions and watching the woman inspect her house. Uzu-san nodded her head at the cushion next to Yugito and the little girl nodded her head eagerly.

She watched as Uzu-san walked forward, noticing for the first time the woman’s bare feet as they padded across the floorboards, sweeping her long robes and train behind her. When she sank down onto the cushion Uzu-san folded her hands gracefully into her lap and Yugito peered at the embroidery on the long sleeves.

They sat in silence waiting as the water boiled, as Yugito left it to cool slightly before pouring it onto the jasmine leaves in her tea pot, as the tea brewed and as the young girl poured the tea into her plain brown cups.

Yugito handed the nicest, least chipped cup to Uzu-san who took it with a small nod of thanks. Finally, Yugito couldn’t take the silence any longer.

“Why did you come to see me?”

“I said I would.”

“But you didn’t have to.”

“I wanted too.”
“Did you just come for Matatabi?”

Uzu-san shook her head.

“I said Matatabi was my child, and you are Matatabi’s Jinchūriki which makes you my child too. I also wanted to see how you were Yugito-chan. You are important, not just because you carry Matatabi, but because you are you.”

Yugito didn’t understand.

“Because I am me?”

“You are a person are you not? Just like Matatabi has her own thoughts, feelings and ideas so do you. I wanted to see how Yugito, not just Yugito of the Nibi, is.”

Yugito felt a swell of desire to hold Uzu-san’s hand. She reached out and found the hand already waiting. Uzu-san’s skin was warm like a summer’s day and her skin was soft and caressing. Yugito couldn’t remember the last time she had held someone’s hand.

“Can you stay forever?” Yugito blurted out and tightened her grip on the woman’s hand as if she could hold her here and keep her from leaving.

Uzu-san pulled gently on Yugito’s hand and the little girl sank willingly against her side. Uzu-san wrapped her arm around Yugito’s body, and her long sleeves draped over the girl’s small form, covering her with silk and hiding her from the world.

Yugito felt Uzu-san breath deeply.

“I cannot stay in Kumo, Yugito-chan. I have to find the rest of my children.”

Yugito flinched and buried her face in the woman’s side, nuzzling as if she could bury herself in the silks of her clothing.

“I can leave you a seal, if you want. If Matatabi pushes a small pulse of her chakra into it, I will know you need me and come to you…”

Inside Yugito’s head Matatabi was growling and muttering. Yugito waited as her Bijuu thought.

“Matatabi?”

“Do you want to stay in Kumo, Yugito?” the Nibi asked. Her odd coloured eyes stared intently at Yugito.

The girl thought for a while. She had no one in Kumo, no one apart from Matatabi. B had visited her a couple of times, but he was busy with the Raikage and she didn’t miss him when he was gone. She thought however, that she would miss Uzu-san when she left.

“Will Uzu-san make me into a weapon?” Yugito asked.

Matatabi yowled in disagreement.

“Mother wouldn’t do that to you or me, kitten.”

“Then I want to go with Uzu-san.”

“Then ask her.”
* 

Yugito unburied her head from Uzu-san’s robes and heard the crackling of the logs on the fire. She looked up at the woman who had in turn looked down at Yugito’s movement and was watching her calmly with steady blue eyes.

“Can – can I go with you?” Yugito whispered and waited, hope blooming in her chest.

Uzu-san smiled.

“If you want to. But only if you want to Yugito-chan. Matatabi shouldn’t force you.”

“She isn’t!” Yugito protested. “We both want to go with you. Matatabi says you won’t make me into a weapon, and I don’t want to be a weapon and you feel like home!”

Uzu-san smiled wider and her eyes crinkled at the corners. Yugito didn’t understand what that expression meant; she had never seen someone make it at her before.

“Well then, I suppose we should get ready to leave.”

*

Chapter End Notes

I love little Yugito. She makes my heart squeeze.

Next chapter - Yugito Part Four:
Uzu and Yugito make preparations to leave. Yugito gets her hair brushed.
Yugito - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Yugito leaves her hut and has her hair brushed.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! I love reading that you guys have enjoyed this so far.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yugito

(Part Four)

*

It didn’t take long to gather up Yugito’s things. She watched as Uzu-san pulled a scroll from her sleeve and stored some of her clothes, books and food inside it. Her treasures were gathered into a small drawstring bag which she could hang across her body.

“Now, if we want to get away without causing too much of a fuss, we will need a decoy that can last a few days.” Uzu-san said.

She drew a strange and complicated pattern on the floorboards with ink and a brush and Yugito tilted her head to one side and watched as Uzu-san muttered under her breath and pushed a small pulse of chakra into the drawings.

There was a puff of smoke and suddenly a version of Yugito was standing in front of her. The copy smiled shyly at the original and waved before trotting over to the futon and laying down.

“What –” Yugito trailed off.

“This is a mimic. It uses fuuinjutsu to create a copy of someone and mimics their abilities, chakra and character perfectly. It will last two weeks with the amount of chakra I put into it and will dispel when we are far away from Kumo. Even if it gets injured it will remain solid and indistinguishable from you.”

“Woah.” The girl murmured and stared at the copy of herself in further awe.

“Did you know she could do that?” Yugito asked Matatabi. The cat shook her head and grinned cheekily.

“It’s pretty cool though. I bet she learnt how to do it from the Uzumaki.”

Uzu-san turned to look at Yugito.
“Now we just need to make you invisible and undetectable so that we can sneak back to my room at the inn and stay there until the morning.”

“We aren’t going to leave straight away?” Yugito trotted over and held out her arms when Uzu-san indicated. The woman had brought out a new, thinner brush and painted different symbols and characters on Yugito’s forearms and forehead. The ink was cool compared to her skin and the brush tickled as it glided along. Yugito suppressed a giggle.

“It would be suspicious if a wandering musician suddenly left in the middle of the night. It is better to leave at a more reasonable hour. I can fit in with the crowd and you will be concealed by the seals.”

“Hmm, okay.”

There was a warm pulse of chakra as the seals were activated and Yugito looked down expecting to be unable to see herself.

“Ummm, why am I still here?”

Uzu-san chuckled and screwed the cap back on her ink bottle before returning it, and the brush, into a seal on her forearm.

“The seal makes you invisible and undetectable to others. You will still be able to see yourself and I can as I am the one who cast the seal. To anyone else however, you are unfindable.”

“Cool.” Yugito murmured.

“Ready to go?” Uzu-san gestured to the bathroom window and Yugito looked around her small hut for the last time. She held no particularly fond memories of her time here. Rather most of her memories had been sad, lonely and wistful with only Matatabi for company.

“Ready!”

*

Yugito slept deeply when they reached Uzu-san’s room at the inn. Uzu-san had let her have the futon and remained awake and on watch - just in case, she said.

When morning came Uzu-san had shared her breakfast with Yugito and tidied her belongings whilst the young girl ate. Yugito found she couldn’t keep her eyes off Uzu-san. As if she was afraid the moment she looked away the woman would disappear. Or she would wake up and find that it had all been a dream.

Soon Uzu-san was all packed up, her shamisen wrapped up and carried in her arms, a small bag to carry over her shoulder. Yugito watched as the woman finished her preparations by brushing out her long hair and pinning part of it up with the two hair sticks: the one with bells and the other with origami birds and shells.

“Would you like me to do your hair kitten?” Uzu-san offered.

Yugito nodded shyly and slunk forward to kneel in front of Uzu-san. Her hair was always tangled and knotted after sleeping. Uzu-san knelt behind her and she carefully parted Yugito’s hair and began to brush it out.

“She’s good at brushing hair.” Yugito whispered to Matatabi.
The Nibi was purring at the sensation of the brush gliding down Yugito’s hair and Uzu-san’s fingers gently parting and shifting the strands.

“There are few greater pleasures in this world than someone caring for you. It makes simple things, like someone brushing your hair, feel blissful.” Matatabi replied.

All too soon Uzu-san finished brushing Yugito’s hair and she expected the woman to stand up and move on. Instead, Uzu-san began to play with Yugito’s hair, shifting it and intertwining it. The girl could feel pins being slid in and pinning various locks in different places.

Uzu-san slid the last pin, the one she had originally given Yugito, into place to hold back her fringe.

“All done.”

Yugito lifted her hands up and gently explored her hair. There was a braided crown on her head and origami butterflies and flowers were holding it all in place.

She blushed furiously and tilted her head down.

“Thank you, Uzu-nee-chan.”

Uzu’s eyes widened with surprise before settling down into an expression of delight and pleasure.

“You’re more than welcome Yugito-chan.”

*  

Leaving Kumo was far easier than Uzu or Yugito expected. The Jinchūriki tucked herself tightly up against Uzu’s side and kept pace with the woman. When they reached the gates of the village, she was sure they would be discovered, and she would be dragged back. Uzu simply handed over the papers that had given her permission to be in Kumogakure, answered a few questions about her activities in Kumo, what she had bought or sold and if she had spoken to anyone particularly.

Uzu calmly answered all these questions and Yugito couldn’t hear any change in her pulse to indicate nerves or stress. Quicker than she could have imagined the papers were returned and Uzu bowed to the ninja at the gate before walking out of the village.

Yugito clutched the long sleeve of Uzu’s robes hardly believing that they had done it. The village seemed to shrink behind them. Smaller and smaller it became, and the sense of freedom bloomed in her chest and mind.

The air outside the village smelt different. Obviously, there were fewer humans and there were interesting plants she couldn’t recall smelling before but there was something else.

“What’s that smell?” she asked Matatabi. It smells like cherry blossoms and salt and soil.”

“That’s Mother. She’s happy so she smells like the things that she is. Remember, she’s not human like you. She is an island, an ocean, whirlpools, magma, trees, wind, soil, sand and rain among other things.”

“What do I smell like when I’m happy?”

Matatabi chuckled and rolled onto her back, rolling around like a kitten.

“You smell like freshly cut grass and logs on a fire. I like it.”
Yugito came out from under Uzu’s sleeve once the village had completely disappeared from view. Uzu smiled and led her off the path, out of sight from the other travellers on the road.

“You alright Yugito-chan?”

“Mm-hm,” she nodded. “Are you Uzu-nee-chan?”

“Yes. I’m happy that you’re happy. Will you be alright to stay under the seal until we get through the next town? It will be easier to hide you from shinobi if we appear to start travelling together in the next town and we change your appearance slightly. It will only take a few hours to get there.”

Yugito nodded again and looked up at the woman.

“As long as I’m with you Uzu-nee-chan.”

“You can stay with me as long as you want.”

Yugito felt that unexplainable feeling in her chest again. It spurred her to reach out for Uzu’s hand and she grasped it tightly.

Uzu smiled at her and led her back out onto the path and hand in hand they walked away from Kumogakure and all the bad memories.

*

Chapter End Notes

I truly think that having someone play with and brush your hair is one of life's greatest small pleasures.

Next Chapter - Kisame Part One:

Uzu and Yugito are travelling through the Land of Hot Water when they inadvertently end up in the middle of a fight. Yugito can smell something fishy...
Kisame - Part One

Chapter Summary

In which there are hot springs, Yugito and Uzu get dragged into an altercation and find a fish. Matatabi suggests having sushi.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! Please let me know what you think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kisame

(Part One)

* 

Yugito had decided she loved travelling and she was growing to love Uzu. They had been travelling for over a month and left the Land of Lightening behind them weeks ago.

Yugito didn’t understand Uzu sometimes. The woman did things that Yugito couldn’t remember anyone ever doing for her before. Things like making sure Yugito wasn’t getting too tired, giving her the softest bedroll and making sure she was tucked under the blanket when they slept outside, treating every scrape she got from clambering and exploring (even the tiny ones that would only take Matatabi a few seconds to heal), giving her the larger portions of their food, holding her hand whenever Yugito reached out, giving her hugs.

Yugito had never realised how amazing a hug could feel. It was like being wrapped up in the softest, warmest, cosiest, safest blanket ever (Matatabi had laughed joyously when Yugito told her that).

Matatabi was happier too. Sometimes Yugito would act as her mouthpiece and the girl could feel how excited the Nibi was to be able to talk to her mother.

That wasn’t to say that everything was great. Yugito discovered that she didn’t particularly like potatoes. She also hated, absolutely, unequivocally hated having wet feet. The way the damp lingered between her toes after rain had seeped into her sandals, and the fabric squelched with each step. It made her want to hiss.

Uzu had laughed and her head tipped back when Yugito explained why she was so grumpy. When she had finally stopped laughing, she pulled out a different sealing scroll from another of the marks on her arm.

From within she pulled out different clothing, all suited to Yugito’s height and size. Together they
had pulled an outfit out of both shinobi and civilian items. A mesh shirt and shinobi pants in a deep blue, almost black colour and a pair of black shinobi boots. Over the top Yugito chose to wear a happi coat. Both Matatabi and she had picked it out of all the other clothing.

A blue colour that reminded Yugito of Matatabi’s flames and wave patterns and swirls that reminded the Bijuu of the ocean and whirlpools of her birth place and long days sat on the cliffs staring out across the sea towards the mainland and the promise of adventure.

Uzu had nodded approvingly at their choice of outfit. The red head always made sure that the origami flower and butterfly pins she used in Yugito’s hair complimented the outfit. Yugito wasn’t sure she would ever stop loving the way Uzu brushed and stroked her hair (mornings and evenings just after breakfast and before bed were her favourite times of the day as that was when Uzu would kneel down, Yugito in front of her, and brush her hair as if it were precious).

Overall, Yugito loved travelling with Uzu and she didn’t think anything could change her mind.

* * *

The Land of Steam was amazing. Yugito decided that whilst she didn’t like cold water (nasty rain) she could get used to being in a country where you were never far from a hot spring.

They had visited several hot springs, some in villages that were small and served a lot of potato dishes, some that were wild and surrounded by forests. Yugito’s favourite was their current one, there were monkeys bathing with them!

They had just finished bathing in the newly named (by Yugito) Monkey Hot Spring, when an enormous amount of chakra began to draw near.

“Uzu-nee-chan!” Yugito murmured and looked over to where the woman was still getting dressed.

“Easy Yugito-chan.” Uzu had turned to face the direction of the oncoming chakra.

There were sounds of battle, blades clashing and a roaring akin to that of a great wave. Yugito felt a shiver run up her spine and Matatabi yowled in her head.

Uzu leapt from where she was standing, half dressed in breast bindings and hakama, and scooped up Yugito and their bags before leaping into the trees. Yugito crawled over the woman’s shoulder to cling to her back and Uzu began to run through the tree branches and away from the incoming shinobi.

Yugito twisted to look behind them and felt terror at the giant wave of water coursing through the trees and uprooting many of them.

“Uzu-nee!” She yowled and the woman glanced a look behind.

With her free hand she bit into her forefinger before dropping to the ground. Her finger moved, faster than Yugito had ever seen, the threat of the wave hitting them spurring her on. Just as the wave was about to hit Uzu finished the last stroke of her seal and a golden chakra barrier rose against the water.

Yugito clutched at Uzu’s bare shoulders hazily noticing, through her terror, the claws that had pierced the woman’s skin and drawn blood. The wave cascaded into the triangular barrier that soared up into the sky and the waters parted around them, continuing on their destructive path.

After what felt like both a few seconds and hours the torrent of water eased and settled. Yugito
watched as a dark shape swam towards them through the water. A cool black eye slunk past and a pointed nose broke the water in front.

“That’s a – that’s a…” Yugito whimpered.

“Shark summons.” Uzu remarked with a hint of curiosity.

“Mmm fish.” Matatabi commented, trying to ease Yugito’s fear. It sort of worked.

A tree had been protected from the onslaught by Uzu’s barrier and the woman ran up it to the sturdiest high branch. Yugito slid down from her back to straddle the branch, her back up against the trunk and her legs wrapped tightly around the thick limb.

Uzu crouched down and looked the girl over.

“Are you alright Yugito?”

She nodded and smiled weakly up at Uzu. Before she could apologise for clawing at the woman’s shoulders there was a great crash as something, or someone hit the barrier that was still intact.

Uzu spun on the balls of her bare feet to peer down at the shinobi who was crouched with their back to the barrier and panting heavily.

“Mist Hunter nin,” She remarked. Her gaze travelled over the new lake that was currently dotted with trees tops. Uzu pointed out the fight that was currently taking place to Yugito and the girl watched curiously.

There was a tall boy swinging a sword that was almost as large as he was. The hunter nin seemed reluctant to get too close but were aware that their target seemed to be tiring.

The boy ran towards the barrier and from their tree branch they could both see that he was sporting obvious wounds. Blood was dripping down one arm that was hanging limply at his side and spotting the water below with red.

“Give up!” One of the hunter nin shouted.

The boy chuckled again and swung the bandaged blade towards them. They dodged and harried at the boy, throwing kunai with paper bombs and detonating them as close to the boy as they could manage.

“My barrier is going to go down in a few seconds Yugito-chan. I need you to stay up here out of the way. Okay?” Uzu looked at the girl out of the corner of her eye.

Yugito wanted to protest that she could help but reluctantly agreed.

“Hold onto our packs.” Uzu offered a rewarding smile and some of Yugito’s frustration ebbed.

The woman ran down the tree trunk until she was just above the hunter nin who was half collapsed against her barrier.

“Release!” She shouted and the second the barrier dropped she snagged the shinobi off the water that began to flood into the now free space. The masked nin gave a half-hearted attempt to free themselves from her grip before slumping in her grasp.

All of a sudden, the explosions increased and the boy who was fighting the hunters went soaring through the air towards their tree. Uzu felt her heart stop as she realised he was going to hit the tree
exactly where Yugito was sitting.

She couldn’t make it in time.

“Matatabi!” She screamed and hoped that the Nibi could hear her. The boy impacted the branch and took the top off the tree and Yugito with him as he smashed through.

Uzu pulled the hunter she was holding onto a branch above the water and darted after the boy who was curled up on the water several metres away.

“Yugito?!” She called frantically and skidded to her knees next to the boy.

He opened an eye and unwrapped his arms. An unconscious Yugito lay on his chest. He had noticed where his trajectory was going and managed to twist to avoid crushing the little girl against the tree, catching her as they both fell and wrapping her up in his arms to take their combined impact on his back and side. There was no sign of his sword and Uzu could see that he was hanging on to consciousness, the arm that had been hanging limply now laying unresponsive on the water.

“I guess you owe me one now.” The boy rasped and grinned weakly showing blood-stained pointed teeth.

Uzu arched an eyebrow.

“Technically if you weren’t being hunted, we wouldn’t have been involved. But I will help you as you made sure she didn’t get hurt.”

She rose to her feet to face the approaching hunter nin. From a seal she withdrew her wakizashi (always sealed within reach when she wasn’t wearing her robes).

There was no exchange of words before the hunters attacked and she pressed back, her still bleeding finger drawing seals on each ninja whenever she could manage to dart in and draw the symbol.

It took a bit of clever footwork and blocking but she had practised katas and taijutsu forms that her body knew instinctively (knowledge like that she had embedded in her body when she made it). As soon as the last hunter had the seal drawn upon them, she activated it.

“Sleep!”

They all fell where they stood, like puppets with their strings cut. Unconscious their chakra couldn’t keep them from sinking partially into the water but Uzu made sure they were all floating face up.

“Aww, just sleeping. Now I have to kill them all.” The boy rasped from where he still lay.

Uzu stared at him. He stared back.

“Can you release the jutsu for this lake? It would be easier to sort this situation out if we were on solid, dry land.” Uzu asked.

He groaned and did so with his hand that had been wrapped protectively around the back of Yugito’s skull.

The water gradually seemed to recede and Uzu used the time to gather all the hunters together,
including the one still hanging from the tree branch. She used some wire to tie them to a tree trunk and made sure the sleep seal was still intact.

“Happy now bossy?”

“Very, thank you.” She retorted and returned to his side.

He chuckled and abruptly fell unconscious. Yugito stirred on his chest as his hand and arm fell away from her back and side.

“Are you all right Yugito?” Uzu asked again. It rankled her how she had, had to ask the same question within only a few minutes. She wasn’t best pleased at being dragged into an altercation between a missing nin and hunters.

“I smell like fish.” Yugito’s upper lip curled back as she sniffed her hair and looked dismayed.

Uzu let out a surprised bark of laughter.

“I thought you liked fish?”

“I don’t want to smell like one… Can we go back to the hot springs now?”

“I just need to sort these hunters out… and we’re taking the fish boy with us.”

“Matatabi wants to eat him…”

“He’ll give you indigestion.”

“I could practise filleting fish?”

“No, leave the fish boy alone.”

“Aww Yugito-nee-chan, that’s no fun!”

*

Chapter End Notes

Our favourite shark boy! He was tricky to write until I got slightly tipsy and then he just flowed onto the page. Hopefully I won't have to get tipsy to write Kisame all the time...

Next Chapter - Kisame Part Two:

Kisame is paranoid and finds himself in the company of two females who seem to completely ignore the fact that he could kill them. There is also meat.
Kisame find himself captive (or at least he thinks he's a captive). They feed and water him and make him think about a few things. (He also thinks they make pretty poor captors).

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments. Please let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He could feel someone watching him. They had been staring at him for the last five minutes at the very least.

Since waking he had kept his eyes closed and taken stock of what he could. His arm was throbbing gently and was bandaged up firmly, but the pain was much less than he would have expected. The other scrapes and cuts had been tended to as well, some bandaged, others smeared with a pungent ointment.

He was lying on his back, on something soft and there was a fire nearby. He could hear the crackling of the flames and smell a hint of wood smoke. And, of course, there was the staring person.

“I know you’re awake. Your heart rate changed when you woke up.”

That was a female voice, a young female voice.

“I’m supposed to tell you that there’s water next to you and it isn’t poisoned or bad for you.” The girl spoke again, and he opened his eyes to find her watching him from across the fire.

It was the little blonde that had been up in the tree.

She pointed at the water flask and he slowly reached out and grasped it. The top was unscrewed, and he sniffed at it cautiously before taking a sip and holding it in his mouth. His affinity with water meant he could usually detect most poisons, but it seemed the girl had told the truth as far as he could tell.

He saw her roll her eyes at his actions. He would be a pretty poor shinobi to just accept water
without testing it, even if it was from a seemingly innocent little girl.

“Where’s the woman?” He asked once he had quenched his thirst.

“She’s making sure we weren’t followed and checking no one will stumble on our camp.”

“Keh.”

“What’s your name?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“Because it’s polite to refer to someone by their name. Otherwise we’ll just keep calling you fish boy.”

“Keh.”

“Fine then. Stay silent fish boy.”

“Don’t call me that brat.”

“Fish boy.”

“I said don’t, or I’ll make you regret it!” He snarled.

The little girl scoffed.

“You aren’t going to make me regret anything. You’re too injured to move around at the moment and I already smell like fish so there isn’t much you can do to make me unhappy.” She retorted with a wickedly sweet smile.

“Keh, you’ve got guts brat.”

“Is that supposed to be a compliment fish boy?”

He let out a short snarl of frustration.

“Kitten, stop antagonising the boy.” An older woman’s voice came from the shadows in the trees and his gaze snapped to where she was approaching.

He made a half move to rise to his feet but was halted by the wave of pain that coursed through his body.

The woman stepped into the firelight and he was surprised to see Samehada strapped to her back. Sweat was trickling down her forehead. He knew how heavy his blade was and it was no shock that she had, had to exert some effort to carry it. What was shocking however was that Samehada had allowed her to touch it.

“You’re back! Can we eat soon?” The blonde girl perked up at the woman’s arrival.

“Soon kitten. I just need to check on our patient.” She undid the ropes she had used to tie Samehada to her back and caught the blade before it fell to the ground. He watched carefully as she propped the sword up against the trunk of a tree.

“Now, how are you feeling?”
He blinked as her attention turned to him. Now he knew where his blade was and that his current captors were the little girl and the woman, he wasn’t sure whether to feel relieved or wary. The redhead had taken down a hunter nin group in mere minutes whilst he had been fighting them for much longer. She must be a formidable shinobi.

“He tried to get up earlier. And he thought the water was poisoned even though it would be a waste of time for us to bandage him and look after his wounds, use our supplies on him and then poison him.” The girl moaned.

She had a point and he felt himself wince at his own paranoia.

The redhead chuckled and guided the girl over to sit by the fire again. There was some meat impaled on sticks cooking on the fire that he hadn’t noticed during his interactions with the brat. The woman pulled one of the sticks up and checked the meat before handing it to the girl.

Satisfied with her meal she was happy to ignore as her companion circled round the fire to kneel next to him.

She moved confidently but elegantly. Knowledge of her body and assured of each movement. But when she knelt, she didn’t kneel like a shinobi, her hands folded into her lap and her body relaxed. She knelt more like a noblewoman. He didn’t like contradictions like this.

“So, going to tell us your name? Or I’m afraid kitten will continue to refer to you as fish boy and you do not seem to like the name.”

“I know the brat’s name. You called her Yugito when you checked on her after I crashed into the tree.” He wasn’t sure what he was doing. Was he threatening her or showing off?

The woman didn’t really react. Unthreatened by his knowledge.

“You know her name so I shall offer mine. I am Uzu.” This was accompanied with a bow. Again, the behaviour of a noblewoman, not a shinobi. Or it could be a trick, to make him sink into a sense of security.

“You are a paranoid one, aren’t you?” Uzu said and he stared at her impassively. “But I suppose a boy who is being pursued by hunters would be.”

She reached over to the fire and pulled one of the sticks of meat out of the ground and offered it to him. He watched her hair, (long, too long, impractical for fighting) glide over her shoulder to pool in her lap.

Uzu took a bite from the meat, chewed and swallowed before offering it to him again. This time he took it and dramatically tore into it. She was unphased by his animalistic approach to eating. Instead she simply rose from his side and went to sit by Yugito.

He chewed on his meat, he thought it was probably rabbit, and observed the pair. The moment the woman was sat the girl leaned into her side. There was an ease of companionship in their movements and interactions, but he didn’t think they were related. They didn’t smell the same and there was a lack of similar facial features.

Uzu ate one stick of meat and shared another with Yugito. The final stick they gave to him and he accepted this time without implying she prove it was untainted.

Once they were finished with their meal the pair sat with Yugito facing the flames and staring into them as the woman began brushing the girl’s hair. Uzu hummed as she did so. He had never heard
that melody before, it didn’t sound like a Mist or Fire tune.

Eventually they finished and the girl brushed her teeth, using some water from a second canteen to rinse her mouth before settling down to sleep on her bedroll. He couldn’t see another bedroll laid out anywhere. Oh, he was on their second bedroll. Something that felt like a tiny bead of guilt crossed his mind.

Yugito lay on her side in her bedroll and he watched as the red head slowly stroked her thumb along the girl’s temple, her hand resting on the back of the girl’s head. It was a tender and caring motion. He couldn’t recall anyone treating him like that. (What did it feel like? To have someone touch you kindly? To not flinch away from your face? She hadn’t flinched when they met, neither did the girl. Were they the first?)

They both knew exactly when the girl fell into slumber as her breathing deepened and slowed. Still Uzu maintained her tender caress. He decided he didn’t feel anything like jealousy. She was being weak, caring for another was weak and showing that weakness in front of a stranger was weak.

But…

He wasn’t sure what to think anymore.

“You should sleep if you can. Judging by your recovering chakra reserves you should be almost fully recovered within the next couple of days. That will hasten if you sleep.”

He felt frustrated at her seemingly lack of paranoia and spat out “Why did you help me?”

“You could have let Yugito get injured. You didn’t.”

“It can’t be that simple.” He growled.

She looked him right in the eyes from across the fire.

“Why not? You did something that was kind, I repaid that kindness.”

“It wasn’t kindness.”

“Maybe, maybe not. But it was an act that meant she remained unharmed.” She said almost glibly. "Besides, I don’t ignore children who are injured and being chased by hunter nin.”

He recoiled back and glared at her.

“I’m not a child.”

She chuckled and smiled at him. (People don’t smile at him. He isn’t the kind of person people smile at. He’s the kind of person people scream at.)

“Hmm, pretty much everyone is a child to me, but I see your point. You are a shinobi, you have a hitai-ate which means you are at the very least a genin but your skill and jutsu imply that you are a Chunin or Jounin. But I can tell, despite your height and your strength you are not an adult.”

“How?!”

She carried on smiling.

“Because you look like you want someone to care for you the way I am for Yugito. Jealousy is all over your face. That isn’t an expression an adult would make, not for someone caring for a child.”
“You’re wrong!”

“Maybe, but if I am then you should probably ask yourself why your hand is reaching out.”

He looked down to see that his uninjured hand was indeed reaching out as if asking to be held, touched, wanted. (Was that what that feeling in his chest was?)

Silence fell over the camp, only the sound of rustling leaves in the trees, Yugito’s soft purring breaths and the crack of a log splitting in the fire broke the stillness.

“Kisame… My name’s Kisame.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kisame Part Three:

Kisame is fed some more, he watches Uzu and Yugito interact. He sort of follows along (like a creepy stalker) and then questions Uzu’s sanity.
Kisame - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Kisame is poked with a stick. He is fed some more and continues to question Uzu's sanity (and his own). Yugito regrets feeding him.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments. Please let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kisame

(Part Three)

*

The little brat was poking him with a stick. She had started by poking him in the side and had now moved on to stabbing at his cheek. She must have found the sharpest stick in the world.

“Cut it out.” He growled.

“No.”

He opened one eye to glare at her. She was crouched down on her haunches and had her head tilted to one side as she decided where to stab at him next.

“You little brat.”

She grinned and he found himself thinking that her cheeks were still covered in a layer of baby fat. He kind of wanted to pinch them.

“Yugito, stop antagonising him.”

The brat pouted and stabbed him one last time before dropping her stick and trotting back to Uzu.

Kisame pushed himself up into a sitting position with only a few twinges of pain. His bandaged arm still throbbed. The rest of his wounds seemed to have eased, however.

He folded the blanket he had been covered with as best as he could with only one fully functional arm and placed it on the bedroll at his feet.

Yugito came round the fire and held out a bowl and spoon to him. Steam was wafting off the contents and his stomach rumbled. The meat from last night had been a mere fraction of his usual intake.
“It’s rice porridge,” Yugito chirped. “And before you start thinking about it, no we haven’t poisoned it.”

He took the bowl with his good hand and placed it in his lap before accepting the spoon as well. It wasn’t meat but he would be an idiot to turn down a free meal. He didn’t realise how hungry he was until the first spoonful.

The sharp tang of ginger and the sweetness of honey hit his tongue and he held back a grunt of appreciation.

Whilst he ate, he watched as Uzu and Yugito began to break camp. They moved easily and fluidly together, rolling up the bedroll and folding the blankets, rinsing out the pot they had suspended over the fire to make the porridge with water from a canteen, putting the fire out with dirt and smothering the flames. He guessed they had been travelling together for a few weeks, minimum.

Finally, all that remained was the bedroll he was still sat on and the bowl and spoon he was eating with. They didn’t seem to be in a hurry, so he took his time eating.

Once they were finished Yugito sat down in front of Uzu and he watched as the woman carefully brushed Yugito’s hair and began braiding and pinning it. Pins with origami flowers and butterflies held the crown in place (part of him thought it was silly to take so much time and effort on something so impractical, another part could see how happy the young girl was).

“All done.” Uzu rested her hands on Yugito’s shoulders and squeezed gently. She beamed and surged to her feet.

“Can I do your hair Uzu-nee?” Uzu handed over the hairbrush without protest and glee filled every part of the young girl. She scampered around to stand behind the woman and started at the crown of her head, slowly pulling the brush through a gathered handful of the long hair.

Uzu, her attention now no longer occupied by Yugito looked at Kisame.

“If you have finished you can use the water in your flask to rinse the bowl out.” She said. He did as she suggested and then rose to his feet.

“Where’s my shirt?” He looked around but couldn’t see any sign of it. “What did you do with it?”

“Gone. It was beyond salvation. There are a few shirts on the log behind you. You can have one of those.”

“Keh.” Kisame grumbled and sorted through the offerings. He settled on a black sleeveless shirt that seemed to have seals woven into it. “What do these do?”

Uzu was watching him calmly.

“They have various intentions. Most are just simple ones to help keep the integrity of the fabric and to make it more responsive to natural ninjutsu. The more complicated ones include aiding the wearer in passing by unnoticed, resistance to weapons and other such attacks and finally temperature control.”

Kisame looked at the material with almost grudging admiration.

“You’re giving me something that has all that?”

“I’m not going to wear it.” Uzu snarked and Yugito snickered behind her.
He pulled it on, wincing as his wounded arm protested at being stretched. Yugito had finally finished brushing the waterfall of hair and was watching as Uzu used some hair sticks and pinned some of it up. Kisame gathered up the other shirts he had dismissed and piled them on the bedroll.

The girl scampered over and gathered it all up, wrinkling her nose at the smell from the bedroll.

“Do you always smell like fish?” Her head was tilted to one side again and she looked up at him expectantly.

“I haven’t had the opportunity to bathe in a while.” He grumbled and was met with a giggle.

“But you’re in the Land of Hot Water.”

“Keh.”

Yugito grinned cheekily and ran over to Uzu who was sealing away the larger items into a storage scroll. Kisame brought over the bowl, spoon and water flask before turning to reclaim Samehada. The sword felt comforting in his hand, but he was surprised that it hadn’t fed off Uzu’s chakra when she carried it into the camp the previous night.

The blade pushed a sensation of too much chakra at him and he felt his eyes widening in surprise. Too much chakra? He had never encountered anyone with too much chakra before. Then again, he had only been the wielder of Samehada for a few months now and he hadn’t met many shinobi with high chakra reserves.

Uzu and Yugito had finished packing their things away and began walking away from their camp and back into the forest. Growling he stalked over to stand in their way. Uzu and the brat stared up at him.

“What happened to the hunters?”

“I made them think you had been caught in a blast from a multitude of paper bombs. I left some scraps of your shirt around the area and your hitae-e. As far as they’re concerned, and all they will ever recall, you got blown up. Congratulations, you’re a free man for a while.” Uzu explained.

They walked around him as his jaw dropped and continued on their path. He spluttered for a bit before charging after them.

* 

They had been walking for a few hours, ignoring the growls and mutterings of the tall boy behind them when Yugito had finally had enough.

“Why are you following us?”

“I’m not.”

“Are.”

“Not.”

“Are too!”

Uzu sighed. Yugito’s eyes snapped suddenly to the woman and Kisame saw a look of trepidation
flit over her face before she hid it. Seemed she was worried about upsetting Uzu.

“Yugito, Kisame is going the same way we are which is into Fire. There is only one obvious path.” Uzu explained.

“But you-know-who says we shouldn’t have fed him, that we’ll never get rid of him now! He’s like a stray cat coming back for scraps!”

“Who’re you calling a stray cat, you little brat?!” Kisame lunged towards Yugito but the girl dodged him and stuck her tongue out at him (he was supposed to be terrifying, why weren’t these two females getting that?).

“Missed fish boy.” She sniped.

*

Hours later Kisame rubbed the back of his head almost bashfully as Uzu thanked him for the fish he had caught in the river. Yugito was eyeing the cooking fish with a catlike intensity and he could have sworn he heard her purring at the smell wafting off them.

Whilst they were eating the fish Kisame asked where Uzu was intending to go. He winced at her answer.

“You know there’s a war going on right? And you’re going to walk right into it with a little girl?”

“I’m still growing!” Yugito protested indignantly through a mouthful of fish. She swallowed before snarking at him. “Besides, I don’t want to be a giant walking fish like you!”

Kisame chuckled darkly and the pair glared at each other.

“Children, eat your food.” Uzu said lightly, ignoring the potential brewing chaos.

“Keh.”

“Yes Uzu-nee-chan.”

“Anyway, I need to go to Rain. The treasures I’m searching for, well, there’s several of them in Rain.”

Kisame grinned. “What kind of treasure?”

“What does it matter to you, you aren’t travelling with us.” Uzu said.

“I don’t know. I just – I think you aren’t a liar and you’re too kind for your own good. I don’t like liars and if you’re going to be walking into a war with a little brat you might need a hand. It’s not like I’m busy or anything. Besides, maybe I’ll find something else to catch my eye and leave you. I don’t have to answer to anyone.” Kisame fumbled through his explanation.

“Hmm, I guess you will just have to find out what it is you want.” Uzu commented. “If that is to travel with us then that is fine. If you decide to leave, then that is fine too.”

“You like us, don’t you?” Yugito had finished her fish and was edging closer and closer to Kisame who still had one left.

“Who would like a brat like you?”
“You like us!” Yugito crowed and then snatched up Kisame’s last fish. The boy roared and dived after her, but she had already danced out of his reach, taking a satisfied bite out of the fish. She made a noise of enjoyment before scampering up a tree trying to escape Kisame’s pursuit. The pair began bouncing around from tree branch to tree branch, ricocheting from tree to ground and flipping and twisting in mid-air occasionally.

Uzu continued eating as if the pair of them weren’t currently playing the most amusing game of tag. A small smile made the corner of her mouth curve upwards at their taunting calls. Maybe it wouldn’t be such a bad thing if Kisame came with them.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kisame Part Four:
Kisame buys Yugito some fruit, they have a chat about humans and he meets Matatabi.
Kisame - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Kisame buys some fruit, a fight starts and Matatabi ends it.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! Please let me know what you think!

Kisame

(Part Four)

The first time he met Matatabi, Kisame froze. The huge feline, blue and black flames raging and spitting, was terrifying. It wasn’t as if he had expected her to be like your average small, fluffy cat. But still. Being in the presence of a Bijuu, a riled up, angered and infuriated Bijuu, was enough to send terror coursing through even the most experienced and controlled shinobi.

The shinobi who had caused Matatabi’s presence were terrified. They were fleeing, like rats, from the Two-Tails who was pouncing and swiping at them – playing with her prey. There was a confidence and surety to her movements. That of a cat who know her prey has no possible chance of escape.

Finally, Kisame found the strength to move and he looked around the now chaotic village, desperately searching for his other companion. How was it so hard to find a woman with long crimson hair? He didn’t know how everything had gone to ruins so quickly. But, maybe, just maybe, if he found Uzu she could calm Matatabi down.

She should have some influence over the Bijuu, right? After all, she had admitted to stealing Yugito and only an idiot wouldn’t have a plan for an enraged Bijuu.

Earlier…

Kisame groaned as they entered a village near the border of Fire and Grass in the Land of Waterfalls. He had been travelling with Uzu and Yugito for nearly a month now and so far he had only been able to attack a few bandits who had dared to try attack them and a boar that had strayed too close to camp (they had, had boar meat for days). He was bored. Especially as Uzu had a no kill rule, or at least a no killing people rule.

To be fair to the older woman she didn’t have many rules. There was the no killing people one, a
no starting fights one and a everyone has to help out at camp one. The first two were a bit of a sticking point. Leaving people alive was so dull and he liked starting fights.

She had, however, begun training with him. Uzu didn’t fight like a true trained shinobi. Her body hadn’t been trained the way a shinobi her age would have. Kisame had noticed that she mainly fought defensively and used her speed and ability to dodge to avoid true conflict. She was sneaky and tricky too. Her sealing ability was something he had never had to face before, and she often won their spars because she had managed to trap him with a seal.

Yugito joined in their training too. He had sensed her dual chakras through Samehada but it had taken him a week of travel to ask for an explanation. He was impressed to find out she was a Jinchūriki. He didn’t ask why she wasn’t trapped in a hidden village. He doubted that any village would be kind to a Jinchūriki, not even one who was still only a small child.

His training with Yugito mainly involved taijutsu and stamina. The little girl had a good basis for training and the ability to take a lot of hits and get back up again, but she lacked something a good shinobi needed. In fact, both females lacked it – a willingness to kill.

He was distracted from his thoughts as Yugito tugged on his hand. He looked down to see her pulling him towards a fruit stall.

“Come on Kisame! I want to get some cherries.” She moaned and tried to drag him towards the glistening fruit.

“Where did Uzu go?” He griped and looked around for the woman. “Why am I babysitting?”

“Ugh, you weren’t listening! Uzu-nee-chan went to go and get some dry goods and earn some money. She said I could get some cherries and fruit and then join her. You’re supposed to come with me!”

“Keh. Why should I?” Kisame stared down at the pouting girl.

“I won’t make any fish jokes for the rest of the day.” Yugito bargained.

“Next two days.”

“Rest of today and until midday tomorrow.” She countered.

Kisame thought it over, ignoring her muttering and moaning and useless tugging on his hand.

“Deal.”

“Yay!” Yugito released his hand and ran over to the fruit stall.

Kisame followed along but kept a watchful eye on the people passing by. The war was raging in all Lands around them and whilst they journeyed, they had seen areas ravaged by battles. This village was the same, too close to the border to have avoided the conflict between the nations. The people here were savvy however and hired mercenary ninja to protect and enforce a no fighting ban.

In essence, this village was a neutral zone where refugees from the wars could come. It wasn’t a perfect system, but the conflict remained outside the village, for now at least. That didn’t mean that shinobi couldn’t be passing through as civilians and Kisame knew that he could be potentially recognised, and someone could sense the Bijuu in Yugito. He also knew that Uzu was demonstrating a high level of trust in him, leaving Yugito in his care. It kind of felt good to be trusted with protecting someone who was so dear to someone else. He knew how much Uzu and
Yugito adored each other (and deep down he felt something that was at least amusement for the two females).

Yugito was bouncing on her toes looking at all the fruit.

“Look! They have cherries and plums and starfruit and oranges!” She chirped and pulled on his hand.

“I can see. Choose what you want then.”

She smiled at him and turned to the seller listing off how much she wanted of each fruit. Kisame added in a request for apples and ignored the knowing grin Yugito made.

They paid and carefully packed the paper bags of fruit into Yugito’s pack, all except for the cherries, and she trotted along with them clutched in her hands. Kisame saw how people looked at him and then shifted out of his way. He felt his lips tightening. This was one of the reasons he hated villages and towns. There was nothing wrong with the way he looked.

All of a sudden, he felt Yugito’s small hand grasping at his index finger. He looked down to see her hand in its entirety was clutching his single finger. It would have been adorable if he hadn’t noticed the way she was watching the people looking at them.

He stopped walking and sank down onto his haunches to look her in the eye. She still held onto his finger.

“What’s wrong brat?”

“Why are they looking at us like that? Can they, can they sense Matatabi?”

Internally Kisame snarled. He knew life as a Jinchūriki couldn’t have been easy, but this confirmed it. Yugito, a little girl who was only a few years old was used to seeing people fear her. It rankled him. He hadn’t much experience with young children nor any with Jinchūriki but he knew that Yugito wasn’t the Nibi and that unless provoked the girl was just like any other child.

“Nah, brat. They’re afraid of me, not you.”

She looked up at him. “Why?”

“’Cause I look funny.”

“You don’t look that funny.” Yugito protested.

“How many people have you seen with blue skin, gills and pointy teeth?” He retorted.

“Only you. But you still don’t look funny. You just look like Kisame.”

“Keh, don’t worry about it brat. I’m used to it.” He shrugged. “People are uncomfortable with things that are different. They fear it or they hate it. It’s instinct and prejudice mixed together.”

“Well, it’s stupid. But I’m glad they don’t sense Matatabi. I was worried they would know, and someone would try and take me away.”

Kisame stood back up to his full height and started leading her further into the village.

“I probably wouldn’t let that happen.” He said offhandedly.
Yugito smiled up at him but continued to grasp his finger. He didn’t shake her off.

*

They had passed a couple of tea houses without seeing Uzu when they came across a large group who had fallen silent as their paths crossed.

A prickle of awareness ran up Kisame’s neck and he shifted into a deeper sense of readiness. On his back Samehada was surging with anticipation. There were shinobi and they were getting ready to attack.

Yugito had sensed his change of mood and she too began to look more aware.

They attacked seconds later. Bursting from their group and charging at Kisame. He felt Yugito let go of his hand and instead tuck herself behind his leg.

Her bag of cherries dropped to the ground and the red fruit spilled out like droplets of blood.

“Take the boy out and get Yugito-san.” The encircling shinobi were ordered and Kisame felt a tinge of surprise.

“Kumo nin, huh?” He taunted. “How fun.”

Samehada fell into his grasp eagerly. The Kumo nin wasted no time in attacking and Kisame parried their attacks with the blade. Samehada eagerly reached out to absorb their chakra and he chuckled as one nin fell, almost completely drained.

“Who’s next?” He snarled and shifted into a more aggressive stance. He couldn’t move, if he did, they would separate him from Yugito, and he wasn’t going to let that happen. He had been trusted with her. And she trusted him to look after her.

The next few minutes were tense as the shinobi darted in, wary of getting too close to his blade and being drained of chakra and trying to find a way of separating them. Kisame was reluctant to pull out any strong jutsu. He was pretty sure that flooding the village wasn’t the best way to protect Yugito, but he would if he had to. He was also certain that soon word of the fight would spread and either the hired ninja protecting the village would intercede or Uzu would.

One of the Kumo shinobi suddenly removed their disguise and Kisame hissed as he felt claws sinking into his leg. A quick glance down and he could see Yugito was staring at the unmasked shinobi with a look of horror on her face.

“Come along Yugito. I didn’t expect to find you this far from Kumo. If you don’t come along quietly, we will kill your companion. If you come now, well, we might let him live.”

“No! I don’t want to go back!” Yugito snarled and tears leaked from her eyes. “You can’t make me!”

“Very well. Kill the boy and contain her.” The nin said in a cold voice.

“No!” Yugito howled and suddenly, she was cloaked in blue and black flames.

Kisame was blasted away and crashed through a shop window. He grunted as he crushed several mannequins and toppled racks of clothing.

There was a cacophony of noise from the street and he pushed himself to his feet. Samehada had
gone wild in his hands, sending the idea of an enormous amount of chakra into his mind. Kisame strode back through the now broken window and froze.

The Two-Tails was terrifying.

He watched as she pounced on the shinobi who had attempted to flee. They didn’t get back up afterwards. Some attempted to attack but were soon fixed in those calculating odd coloured eyes. Her two tails flicked around and smacked the ninja, sending them crashing into and through buildings. Finally, only the leader remained, and he tried to dodge the Nibi’s attacks.

She roared and a ball of fire built up in her mouth. She released it and the Kumo nin had no chance of evasion.

Then, only Kisame was left and he watched as Matatabi fixed her gaze on him.

“Uhh, nice kitty?” He offered up and plunged Samehada into the ground, leaving his hands empty.

The Nibi stared at him for a moment.

“*Yugito was right. You do smell like fish.*” She rumbled.

*

Chapter End Notes

Kisame is such a big brother. He makes my heart squee.

Next chapter - Matatabi

Matatabi is reunited with her Mother. Kisame takes everything in his stride. He buys more fruit.
Matatabi

Chapter Summary

Matatabi is reunited with her Mother. Kisame takes everything in his stride. He buys more fruit.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments. Let me know if there's anything you guys would like to maybe see in this story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Matatabi

*Matatabi stared down at Kisame. She could see that he was unsure whether or not retorting to her comment would be accepted. She held back a snicker. Yugito was right, he was fun to tease. And he made it so easy.

She could hear screams and shouts from neighbouring streets. Seems they would have to make a quick exit soon.

“Mother’s coming!” She suddenly sensed the woman hurtling towards their location. She would know that chakra and energy anywhere. Warm, golden strength that reminded her of the first few months of her existence on the island that had been her home.

“Mother?!” Kisame spluttered and pulled Samehada from the ground.

Matatabi ignored him and her eyes widened as Uzu skidded around the corner, her robes flying wildly behind her. The woman froze and they locked eyes Bijuu and Uzushio in one another’s presence once more.

“Mother!” Matatabi raced towards the woman and was met halfway. The Bijuu sank down onto her belly and pressed her muzzle against Uzu. The woman had her arms up and cradled as much of Matatabi’s face as she could.

“I missed you Matatabi.” Uzu whispered.

Matatabi could only yowl and purr and pressed her nose against Uzu’s stomach. She had missed her mother’s embrace. It felt like sunlight on the cliffs, the salty tang off the whirlpools, the tickle of the rivers and all the other parts that had made Uzushio her home.

* They were interrupted in their reunion by Kisame who had marched up and was watching the street
for any signs of the village’s hired ninja. The response time was pretty crap, in his opinion, but the longer they were absent the more time they would have to leave without being attacked again.

“Not that I don’t have questions and I would love to let you continue whatever the hell this is,” He growled and indicated at their embrace. “But we’re probably about to have a bunch of hired ninja come down on us who will probably attack first and ask questions later. We also have a group of unconscious Kumo nin who would like nothing more than to take the Nibi back with them and they now know we were here and that Yugito was travelling with me. It’ll be harder to avoid them if they retain that knowledge.”

Uzu nodded and released Matatabi reluctantly. There was no way she was going to be able to hide the confrontation in the Kumo shinobis’ memories, but she could alter it slightly so that they would be unable to recall Yugito’s companion. That should buy them some freedom.

Matatabi stayed where she was and looked at Kisame with a mixture of frustration and respect. He held his ground and stared right back.

“Keh.” He muttered.

Matatabi growled. Uzu ignored them all as she flitted to each unconscious shinobi and altered their memories with a seal. She used one of the inks she had taken from Uzushiogakure’s ninja sanctuaries. There was no need to use blood for such a simple memory seal. Her brush slid over the cheek of each shinobi, it would have been better to use the forehead, but she didn’t have time to untie and retie every headband.

Once she was finished, she turned to see Matatabi and Kisame in the world’s oddest staring competition.

*

Matatabi broke the unspoken competition at her return and looked sadly down at her Mother. She knew she would have to retreat back into Yugito now. It would make their escape easier. After all, there would already be rumours flying around about a giant cat and the last thing they needed was her as an obvious target to track.

But she still felt a pang of regret and sorrow. She had only had a few seconds with her Mother and whilst she appreciated Yugito acting as her mouthpiece it wasn’t the same as being present and able to touch Mother.

“I will try and find a way to alter the seal on Yugito.” Mother announced and she raised her hand and placed it on Matatabi’s nose. “I can’t remove you from her, not without killing her and whilst I love you Matatabi, I won’t kill for you.”

“I would never ask you too! I don’t want Yugito to get hurt, I’d rather stay stuck in her forever than let my kitten get hurt or killed!” Matatabi protested.

Mother smiled.

“I’m glad. But I will examine the seal and see if I can find a way for you to manifest without taking over Yugito. There must be a way to alter the seal, after all it isn’t an Uzumaki design so it will probably be inferior.”

Matatabi laughed.

“Thank you, Mother. I will wait for that day. Yugito will be tired when I release my hold on her.”
She will probably need to be carried.”

Kisame grunted “I can carry the brat.”

“You are alright, for a fish.” Matatabi sniped. Kisame scoffed and looked to the side almost bashfully.

“You should get some more cherries when you leave. Kitten dropped hers when you were attacked. I don’t want her to be even more sad.”

“Of course. We will look after your kitten Matatabi.” Uzu promised.

Matatabi looked at Mother one last time before retreating back into Yugito. Her flames whirled and rushed back inside the girl’s body and within seconds the only remnants of her presence were the defeated Kumo nin, the damaged shops and buildings and the little girl swaying wearily on her feet.

*

Kisame lunged forward and scooped Yugito up into his arms before she could hit the ground. She blinked tiredly up at him, a small hint of surprise on her face. She looked around slowly for Uzu and reached out her hand to the woman. Uzu held it and her warmth suffused Yugito’s aching body.

“Uzu-nee…” She said tremulously and they could hear the tears in her voice.

“You’re alright Yugito. Don’t worry. Matatabi protected you and Kisame. We have everything handled, just go to sleep.”

She blinked muzzily before settling into Kisame’s hold, her head burrowing against his chest and her hair, which had burst from its crown, draped over his upper arm hanging down like a silken banner. Kisame cradled her carefully and returned Samehada to his back. He had scooped up Yugito’s pack when he ran after Matatabi and he handed it to Uzu, warning her to be careful of the fruit inside.

Uzu smiled tenderly at the sight the two made before leading the way out of the ruined street. They passed through the village unhindered as many of the occupants had fled. By the time they reached the market there were no civilians anywhere to be found. The hired shinobi had finally responded to the fight and it was simple enough for the trio to sneak past them.

On the way past the fruit stall Kisame paused and collected a large paper bag of cherries. He even dropped enough coin into the box to cover the cost.

Uzu remained on watch as he did so but felt fondness blossoming in her chest as he placed the bag of fruit in Yugito’s lap.

*

When she woke several hours later, Yugito was still cradled in Kisame’s arms as he marched along after Uzu. She could see the woman’s crimson hair leading the way and feel the way Kisame was holding her, like she was something precious.

A paper bag crinkled in her lap and could smell the sugary promise of cherries.

“Kisame bought them for you.” Matatabi informed her.
A warm feeling suffused her small body.

“He’s not too bad, for a fish.” Yugito whispered to her Bijuu.

“Hmm, I like him too.”

“I guess we can keep him.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Nagato: The Ame trio have been wandering around a while since Jiraiya left them. Yugito tries to make some new friends. Nagato likes the pretty lady with the red hair, she looks like his mum.
Nagato

Chapter Summary

The Ame trio have been wandering around a while after Jiraiya has left them. Yugito tries to make some new friends. Nagato likes the pretty lady with the red hair, she looks like his mum.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! Please let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nagato

* 

Jiraiya-sensei had left them. He had known, deep inside, where he didn’t really like to acknowledge the sadder thoughts, that Jiraiya-sensei would never stay. He had said so, just until they were strong enough to look after themselves.

It still hurt, however. They had been together for three years. Three years of training, learning and living together. Him, Yahiko, Konan and Jiraiya-sensei. They were a family. Then Jiraiya-sensei left them.

He wasn’t sure how to feel about it. He knew he was stronger now. Strong enough that he could protect Konan and Yahiko. That they could protect each other and fend for themselves. But at the same time, he still wished Jiraiya-sensei had stayed.

They began journeying out from their hideout, making sure to turn over their tiles anytime they left. They didn’t like staying there all the time. It wasn’t the same since Jiraiya-sensei left. It didn’t feel like their home. His loud presence had filled the room and made them laugh. Venturing out to explore their land was the start of their goals though. They were going to fulfil their dream of becoming strong enough to rule the world, to bring peace to Rain, to protect each other so they wouldn’t have to suffer anymore.

Yahiko led the way. His orange hair a beacon through the rain, unfaltering and strong. Nagato and Konan walked slightly behind him and to either side. They were a unit, a family but Yahiko was their leader.

Under his rain cloak Nagato kept his book pressed close to his chest. The book Jiraiya-sensei had left him, a story meant to inspire him, a story to help make peace in the world. He was still sad that Jiraiya-sensei had left them, but the book provided some small measure of comfort.

*
They didn’t actively involve themselves in the fights between Rain and the other shinobi. For the most part they travelled, looking for other children like them. Ones whom war had taken from and inflicted pain upon. It was harder than they had thought it would be.

Most of the children they had come across were too frightened, too weary and sick of fighting that they had no resolve. They wanted peace but war had taken too much from them and they did not have the strength to try and change the world.

Yahiko never gave up and Nagato (not for the first or last time) admired his resolve and the unwavering strength in his spine. He knew Konan saw it too.

It was on a battlefield where shinobi were still fighting that they first saw them. A trio of travellers but ones who were very different to them. A tall man-boy wielding a bandaged blade and sending attackers flying through the air, a blonde girl, younger than them staying close to his legs and sending out kunai and shuriken at the attackers and a woman with hair a deeper shade of crimson than his and robes flying behind her as she fought.

Yahiko told them to crouch down and watch. This trio wore no headband, no insignia that they could recognise on their clothing, no affiliation to any nation or village. They had been watching for a few minutes when Nagato realised something.

“They haven’t killed anyone.” He murmured.

“What?” Yahiko queried.

“Their attacks are causing injury but nothing fatal or life-threatening. They’re just removing the shinobi from the fight.” Nagato pointed as the woman dodged an attack only to slam the hilt of her wakizashi on the back of a Rain nin’s head. The nin fell to the ground unconscious and the woman left to dart at a new attacker.

“She’s using paper seals.” Konan whispered and pointed to several locations where there were seals pasted onto the ground or fallen shinobi.

“What do they do?” Yahiko peered curiously at them.

Konan shook her head. “I don’t know. I can’t tell.”

The blue man was laughing and taunting his enemies and the little girl who was following close behind him snapped something at him.

They watched as the woman rolled her eyes before bringing her hands into a sign. Suddenly, everything stopped. The shinobi they had been fighting froze where they stood, weapons that had been thrown hung in the air and even the very droplets of rain hung like diamonds.


“The rain is still falling here.” Konan held her hand out as if to highlight the water droplets that were still bouncing off them.

“It must be those seals.” Yahiko said excitedly. “We should try and take some once they finish. Maybe we can copy them and use them ourselves.”

“I don’t know.” Nagato cautioned. “They seem quite powerful. They fought off that many shinobi without killing them. I doubt the seals are that easy to use.”
A shout from the battlefield drew their attention once more.

“That was dull. They were all so weak.” The man shouted and sat down on a boulder, resting his blade on his shoulder.

“It’s your fault! You barged into their fight!” The girl yowled and swiped at him. He ducked her attack and laughed as she skidded in the mud.

“Now, now children. Don’t make me walk you back to Grass.” The woman teased.

“Keh, I’m not like the brat. Don’t lump me in with her.”

The girl screeched again and launched herself at the man once more. This time he caught her by the back of her cloak and shirt and held her at arm’s length. She swung at him and missed; her arms too short to reach his face.

Resigned she reached up and grabbed his wrist.

He yelped and let her go, she landed on all fours and darted away as he kicked out at her. The trio watching knew that his kick wouldn’t have landed, he had aimed too high deliberately.

“No claws!” He yelled at the girl. She stuck her tongue out at him before trotting over to stand by the red head. The blue man followed after with his blade attached to his back.

“Any of this lot the ones you were looking for?” He asked the woman. She shook her head.

“No. But they’ve been watching us from over there.” Her finger stretched out and she pointed directly at their hiding place.

Yahiko hissed and gestured for Nagato and Konan to retreat. Before they could escape however the blue man was standing in their way, his arms hanging relaxed at his sides.

“Aww. It’s three little shrimps. Just what we don’t need, more brats.”

“Kisame, behave.” The woman said from behind them and the trio moved back to back so they could defend each other.

The little blonde girl poked her head out from behind the woman and her face lit up.

“Hi, I’m Yugito!” She pranced forward and held out her hand.

Nagato stared in disbelief. The woman had known they were there the whole time? And she had been looking for them? And now this little girl, who looked to be about five, was introducing herself as if this was all perfectly normal?

“Maybe they’re all mute?” The blue man, Kisame, said.

“Shut up fish boy.” Yugito sniped.

“Make me brat.”

“Children.” The woman warned. The pair fell silent but glared at each other.

Were they companions or enemies? The woman seemed to be the leader. Nagato was curious about her hair, it looked like his mother’s colour.
“Let’s start again shall we? I am Uzu, this is Yugito and that’s Kisame. We don’t intend you any harm.” The woman introduced herself and her companions.

“So, what?” Yahiko snapped.

The woman sighed.

“Does no one teach their children how to introduce themselves? This is just like Kisame all over again.”

The shark man scoffed and looked away.

“What do you want with us?”

Nagato watched as Yugito finally dropped her hand, disappointment clear on her face. Kisame reached over and poked her cheek. She swiped at his hand but some of the disappointment ebbed. Nagato felt guilty.

“Nothing.” Uzu said.

“Then why were you looking for us?” Konan interjected before Yahiko could get more wound up.

“Well, you are all descendants of Uzushio.”

The trio froze. That was a secret. No one was supposed to know. They hadn’t even told Jiraiya-sensei.

*

Nagato could still recall the day when they had all realised their parents had been from Uzushio. When he had first met Yahiko and Konan they had each only given their first name and so did he. But gradually, over time and as they began to trust each other they had spilled the secret. Their parents had all been from clans of Uzushio, the fallen village on an island in Whirlpool country.

An Uzumaki, Fuuma and Yayoi had been reunited amid a war. It was almost auspicious. From then on, their bond had only deepened. But they had all agreed, they would never tell anyone else their clan names. It wasn’t safe.

*

“Oh dear. That seems to have upset you all.” Uzu said worriedly. The trio of children were now glaring at her and Kisame.

“How did you know?” Yahiko growled.

“That’s cause Uzu-nee is special.”

The woman’s name finally registered with Nagato. Combined with the red hair…

“Are you an Uzumaki?” He said tentatively.

“Hmm, not quite. Its rather difficult to explain. If you wouldn’t mind, we could find shelter and I will explain it all. You can leave at any time. We won’t stop you.”

Kisame and Yugito had stepped back behind Uzu, aware their presence was making the trio uncomfortable and they watched curiously as Uzu negotiated with the children.
“Fine. But we’re leaving when we want. And if you try anything,” Yahiko threatened. “We’ll kill you.”

“Of course. I promise we won’t stop you, nor will we try to harm you in anyway.” Uzu said.

“Promises aren’t worth much here.” Yahiko scoffed and Nagato winced at the venom in his voice. “It’s a war. They get broken all the time.”

“Uzu-nee doesn’t break her promises.” Yugito protested and scowled at Yahiko. Nagato shared a look with Konan and they both reached out to rest a placating hand on Yahiko’s arms. He subsided with a grumble before marching off to find a suitable shelter.

Konan and Nagato trotted after him, keeping a wary eye on the other trio who followed behind them.

“Do you really think she’s an Uzumaki?” Konan whispered to Nagato.

He shrugged his shoulders and peered back at the woman from behind his hair.

“Her hair is the same colour as my mother’s.” He murmured.

Konan held out her hand and Nagato took it. A soft squeeze and he could feel the love and reassurance Konan was sending him.

Maybe this woman was an Uzumaki. Maybe she was family. Maybe he wasn’t the last Uzumaki in the world.

Maybe, she could be family.

*

Chapter End Notes

Nagato was quite tricky to write. Tbh, all the Ame trio are for me... But I'm trying.

Next Chapter - Yahiko:
In which Yahiko is a list maker, has some trust issues and has a philosophical debate about what 'peace' is to him...
Yahiko

Chapter Summary

Next Chapter - Yahiko: In which Yahiko is a list maker, has some trust issues and has a philosophical debate about what 'peace' is to him...

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yahiko

*

Yahiko was still only young but there were important things he had already learnt from his life.

1. People die. His parents died, his neighbours, friends, village. They all died. It was the ultimate fact of life. Everything and everyone, comes to an end.
2. Hunger was the beast in your belly that could make you do almost anything for a bite to eat. He had done some pretty bad things to get food. And he knew he would do it again if he ever felt that gnawing beast in his belly again.
3. Promises are not worth anything. His parents had promised they would be fine, that they wouldn’t be killed by the enemy shinobi waging war in Rain. That promise had been broken. Jiraiya-sensei had promised that someday there would be peace. He didn’t think there could ever be peace. People are too selfish, greedy and covetous. And full of hate.
4. Being alone was terrifying. When he had been on his own, every night was a balance of sleeping enough to keep his strength up and staying alert enough that he could protect himself. Finding Konan had meant they could share the watch and look after each other.
5. He didn’t think he could trust anyone other than Konan and Nagato. After all, Jiraiya-sensei had left. And Nagato and Konan understood his dream. They didn’t need anyone else.

He didn’t trust the strange woman that was following them. She was odd, her companions were just as odd, and they acted as if travelling through a war zone was the same as going for a stroll in a park. Besides, the shark man had taken down shinobi with mere swings of his blade and the woman had frozen the entire area.

No one with that much power could be good news, especially if she had deliberately been looking for them.

Yahiko led them to a cave system and the shark man (Kisame, his mind reminded him of the shinobi’s name) checked deeper in the caves for traps or potential enemies.

Konan started a fire and the three of them sat on one side, closest to the entrance to the cave. They watched warily as Uzu and Yugito stripped off their dripping cloaks and laid them out to dry.
somewhat. Yugito shivered all the way from her feet to her head and her head flicked from side to side as if she was shaking off water.

Once Uzu sat the young girl had clambered into the cradle made by the woman’s legs and leaned back against her guardian. The pair were just too relaxed for Yahiko’s liking.

Yahiko kept Nagato and Konan close. All three of them remained on their guard.

Kisame returned and propped his bandaged blade against the cave wall. He didn’t move as close to the fire and sat slightly behind Uzu and Yugito, half-buried in the shadows. Yahiko signalled to Konan and she kept her attention on the blue man, trusting Nagato and Yahiko to watch the other two. Kisame noticed her carefully monitoring him and he offered a wide grin full of shark teeth.

Konan shivered.

“Well. You said you’d explain.” Yahiko snapped at Uzu.

The woman smiled softly and wrapped her arms around Yugito as the little girl opened her mouth and surged upwards as if she were about to start snarling at Yahiko. The girl grumbled but settled down under the material of the wide sleeves, using them like a blanket, closed her eyes and seemingly fell asleep.

“I did. I will try to explain as best as I can. It might be difficult to understand.” She warned.

“Several years ago, shinobi from different nations feared one nation, one village in particular. The village was renowned for the shinobi who could use fuuinjutsu to great effect. Their sealing ability could change the tide of war. The nations feared that these fuuinjutsu masters would come to the aid of the largest and strongest nation, Konoha.”

Nagato shifted. All three of them thought back simultaneously to their sensei and his powerful teammates.

“Just before this war broke out the fearful nations banded together and attacked the fuuinjutsu masters on their homeland. It took two days, but they slaughtered all who lived in the village. Some citizens and shinobi however, escaped. They used a transportation seal, their remaining chakra and energy from their homeland to send them all over the nations, to hide amongst their enemies. That was the end of the siege on Uzushio and the Fall of Uzushiogakure.”

Yahiko knew this story. His parents had told it to him, a cautionary tale. But only a few had known of the transportation seal that had sent survivors into the world and away from the massacre.

“How did the civilians and shinobi hide if the village had fallen?” He queried. Only someone who had been in the transportation seal would know. His parents had told him where the children and civilians had been hidden. If this Uzu truly was from Uzushio she would know.

“They had been led into the heart of Uzushio. Guided by the foxes into the sanctuary of the island. I sent the foxes to lead my children to where I could keep them safe.”

Yahiko startled back and felt Nagato press up against him.

“What?”

“Your parents were shinobi. I remember them. Your mother loved to dance, your father liked to sit on the cliffs and watch the gulls. They were both skilled with wind-style jutsu. I remember them when they were courting, using gliders to soar and dance in the wind. They were married on the
red sands of my beaches, just before sunset.”

Yahiko trembled. His parent’s stories were seemingly true. They had told him Uzushio was alive. That the island had a conscious, spoke to her people and protected them. He didn’t believe them, but here was this woman who felt like a whirlpool and a sea breeze who knew things no one but he knew.

“I thought Uzushio was the land and sea. You’re human.” He accused.

“We made this body. We wanted to find our children and bring them home. It has been long enough since the Fall that the nations have forgotten about Uzushio. We have been relegated to footnotes in history. Our strength has returned, and we are stronger than before. The time is right for us to bring our children home.”

It was confusing how she went from talking about herself to talking as if there were more than one of her. He didn’t understand fully. But he didn’t think he wanted to. He still didn’t trust her.

“So what do you want with us?” Yahiko said bluntly.

Uzu smiled at his accusatory tone.

“Nothing.”

He scoffed. “Everyone wants something.”

“I would like my children to return home. I will not force you or any to do so. I may think of you all as my children, but you are all individuals with your own desires, hopes and dreams. If you wish to come to Uzushio with us, then that would make me happy. If you desire to remain in Rain however, pursuing your own dreams then I will leave you be.”

This woman was so weird.

“This is our home now. We don’t know Uzushio.” Yahiko replied. He could see Nagato and Konan flinching at his snappy tone but ignored them.

“Very well. If that is what you wish. Know that if you ever change your mind you can always go to Uzushio. We would welcome you.” Uzu said.

Behind her Kisame scoffed.

“Are you sure about this?”

Uzu shrugged. “He’s right. They weren’t born on Uzushio. We are connected but this land is their birthplace. It has just as much if not more of a claim on them than we do.”

“Keh. You’re making a mistake.” Kisame turned his attention to Yahiko. “Rain is not going to change any time soon. It is a battlefield for the great nations to ruin.”

Yahiko surged to his feet.

“We’re going to change that!” He shouted. “We’re going to bring peace to Rain and stop the nations from using it as a war zone.”

“Admirable goals.” Uzu interjected softly and sent a slightly scolding look at Kisame. The man sniffed and turned away to stare at the rain pouring down outside the cave.
Uzu’s face softened and she turned back to the Rain trio.

“What is peace?”

Yahiko spluttered. “Wh-what do you mean?”

“What is your peace I suppose I should say?” She mused. “My version of peace may not look like yours.”

“Our peace is being strong. Strong enough to stop the nations using Rain as their battlefield. Strong enough to stop conflicts. Strong enough to stop the people of Rain dying at the hands of foreign shinobi.”

“So, strength is your peace.” Uzu surmised. “What about you?”

She looked at Nagato and he flinched from behind his hair.

“M-m-me?”

“What’s your peace?”

Nagato looked at Yahiko.

“I believe in Yahiko.”

A swell of affection rose in Yahiko and he leaned into Nagato, knocking his side gently with his elbow. Nagato ducked his head down further but Yahiko could still see the blush spreading across his fair cheeks. Konan smiled too.

“Believing in him is good. But that doesn’t mean his version of peace is the same as yours.” Uzu remarked and all three of them turned surprised eyes on her.

“B-but…” Nagato paused. “I just want to protect my friends.”

Konan nodded next to him.

“If that means becoming stronger than everyone else so I can protect Yahiko and Konan, then that’s what I’ll do.”

Yahiko leaned deeper into Nagato’s side.

“But, if you become stronger and you are stronger than anyone else your peace will be brought about by fear.” Uzu said.

“No, it won’t!” Yahiko protested. Uzu raised an eyebrow.

“No?”

“No, we won’t use fear to make peace.”

“So, you kill your enemies because you are stronger than they are. What do you think happens next?”

“We bring peace.”

“And what of your enemy’s friends and families? What are they going to do?”
“I don’t know. It doesn’t matter!” Yahiko shouted.

“They’ll attack you because you killed their friends.” Kisame interjected.

“Then you will defend yourselves and they will defend themselves. Some of them will die, some of your people will die. On and on and on it goes.” Uzu said in a monotone. “You humans are very good at warfare. The circle of hate and pain doesn’t stop.”

Yahiko fell silent.

The rain fell heavily outside the cave. For some reason, the sound of the water hitting the ground made his teeth ache and his stomach twist.

“Well, that’s just what I’ve learned.” Uzu said. “But I can tell you are resolved. So, we will leave you alone. I will however give you a gift. If you ever need or want me, all you have to do is say my name – my full name and I will come to you.”

She stood up, Yugito in her arms, the little girl’s legs instinctively wrapping around the woman, even in the depths of her slumber. Kisame wrapped the cloaks around the two females, making sure they were covered before donning his own and picking up his blade.

Uzu nodded to the Rain trio before heading back out into the world.

In the place where she had been sat, a red origami fox sat, its tail wrapped around its paws and its head pointed towards them.

It was a long time before any of them moved and they just stared at the fox.

“Could she be right?” Yahiko murmured.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Konan: She loves her boys and wants them to achieve their dreams, but Konan also wants them to be safe.
Konan

Chapter Summary

She loves her boys and wants to them to achieve their dreams, but Konan also wants them to be safe.

Chapter Notes

You guys are awesome and I appreciate everyone who has made it this far! Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments!

I'm rewatching Shippuden and my brain is in an absolute frenzy at the poor parenting/child endangerment! That being said I'm also being hit every five seconds with feels as the babies grow and get stronger. Gaara's crying face when he found out his mother did love him is just....

Hence, this fic which I kinda just intended to use as a word dump for my feelings has started to develop a proper plot... and arcs... but no fillers (hopefully). Please let me know if there are things you guys would like to see, and if I can I'll work them in.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Konan

* 

Konan loved Yahiko and Nagato with all her heart. They were hers, her boys and she had long ago made a vow to protect them, even from themselves.

She adored Yahiko’s resolve and will. His endless strength and certainty that they could be great and bring peace (although, for the first time ever, she had seen that surety waver). Yahiko was a beacon guiding her and Nagato and she basked in his light, adoring him with small smiles and the brush of fingers against his hand, shoulder, back.

She adored Nagato’s sweet nature. He was so kind and gentle. Sometimes his quietness was a soothing opposite to Yahiko’s boisterousness. If Yahiko was the sun, Nagato was the moon, no less magnificent or important but stiller, calmer, quieter in his strength. She adored him with hugs, nestling against his side as they rested, sharing her food with him, and being given food in return.

If Yahiko and Nagato were the sun and moon, she supposed she would be a small star. She didn’t think she shone as brightly as her boys, but she was there, between them. The bridge between their differences, strengthening them, holding them together, being the balm on the rare occasions they clashed heads. She was the soothing voice of reason, the stalwart believer in both of them and their protector. Anyone who wanted to harm her boys would have to through her first.
She had often thought back on Uzu’s words. They had left the area where they had encountered the woman long ago, but she carried the origami fox in the folds of her clothing. Konan could sense that there was something different about the paper the fox was made of but when she had attempted to unfold it (whilst she was on watch and her boys were sleeping soundly) the fox had come to life and dodged her fingers. She had never known anyone else able to make the paper move. Her mother had taught her how to make origami flowers, butterflies, animals and boxes, but none of her mother’s creations ever moved.

The fox had remained on her palm, seemingly staring at her in a manner that felt almost as if she were being scolded. Then it had nuzzled at her fingertip, arching its paper back like a cat and tickling her other fingers with its tail.

From that night onwards Konan would bring the origami fox out and play with it, making her own origami animals and directing them to play. The fox enjoyed chasing her origami rabbits and pouncing on them. Soon, she had a veritable menagerie that played and entertained her whilst she was on watch.

She knew Nagato had seen her origami animals, and Uzu’s fox, but he hadn’t said anything to Yahiko. He understood that sometimes Yahiko needed time to process things. His stubbornness could be infuriating but they loved him anyway.

* 

Standing in a muddy field a few weeks later Konan panted as she stared at the shinobi surrounding them. She didn’t know what had gone wrong.

They had come across a group of Rain shinobi, ones who had offered to let them join. Yahiko had agreed and for a while they had remained on the outskirts of the group, accepted but not necessarily welcome.

Then they had been attacked by enemy shinobi and Nagato had shown his true powers whilst protecting them. From that point on the Rain shinobi had been friendlier towards them, particularly towards Nagato.

It made Konan’s skin crawl, the way some of the shinobi looked at Nagato when he couldn’t see. Their eyes were greedy and cold but there was also fear there. She knew Yahiko had seen it too. Konan stayed quiet. It was good that they underestimated her.

They had continued travelling and fighting with the group. Camaraderie seemingly blooming between the boys and the others. Konan found herself pushed to the edges and she worried that her boys were going to forget her. Some of those worries were assuaged at night when both of them would place their bedrolls either side of her and she was smothered with their presence and warmth during cold nights.

Still, even with all those signs, she hadn’t truly feared their companions. That was a mistake she dearly regretted. They had met up with another group of shinobi - led by Hanzō.

Up close Hanzō was just as intimidating as he had been when they spied on him fighting against Jiraiya-sensei and the other newly titled Sannin. Someone had whispered into Hanzō’s ear and his greedy eyes had fallen on Nagato. He pulled the boy into his side and began to talk cheerily with him.

Then, Yahiko gave a grunt and stumbled off the road and into a muddy field. Konan darted after him and found him panting, a kunai buried in his side. Rage filled her and her paper flew up from
her skin, shielding them as her scream ripped through the air and their former companions turned on them.

Nagato was held back from joining them, Hanzō’s hand tight on his arm and a kunai pressed against his throat. Konan propped Yahiko up against her and he leaned heavily against her but prepared to fight.

They were encircled and outnumbered.

“It seems this boy is more attached to them than you told me.” Hanzō drawled. Konan glared at him. “Capture them alive and we can use them as an incentive for this one to follow my orders.”

“Konan! Yahiko!” Nagato cried and struggled in Hanzō’s grasp.

Fury filled Konan and she sent her paper to attack whilst keeping some back to catch kunai and shuriken which had been flung at them. Yahiko assisted where he could but he was distracted by the weapon lodged in his side and the tears streaming down Nagato’s face.

She could tell that they were in a bad place. Her paper could only do so much with Yahiko relying on her to defend him. She could sense his strength waning, his wound was more grievous than she had thought.

“Fine, we only really need one to make the boy obey. Kill the orange-haired one. The girl will do.” Hanzō changed his orders.

“No!” Nagato cried and his power ripped from him, blasting the shinobi away from him. Konan cursed as Hanzō’s eyes lit up with that greed, the same as the other shinobi had held when they witnessed his power.

Yahiko slumped against Konan’s side, blood soaking into her cloak as he crumpled to his knees. Konan let him sag against her legs and renewed her attack on their enemies. She could see that Nagato was fighting to reach them, but she knew he wouldn’t make it in time.

The origami fox within her clothing stirred and leapt out, landing on the mud in front of them and tilting its head. Desperation and hope flickered within her.

“Uzushio!” She cried and the origami fox lit up, glowing with golden chakra.

Konan closed her eyes and flung herself over Yahiko’s head and back, protecting him as bombs raced towards them. She heard Nagato screaming.

Then something was draped over her head and there was pressure against her side. She tilted her head and was amazed to see Uzu crouched down next to her. One arm was wrapped over her and Yahiko, the long sleeve of the woman’s robe covering them slightly. Her other hand was holding a parasol out in front of her, shielding them from the front as the bombs diffused on impact and fell inert. Yugito was there too, pressed up against Konan’s side.

“Kisame, if you wouldn’t mind retrieving Nagato?” Uzu remarked calmly.

Konan lifted her head fully to see that Kisame was standing at Yahiko’s back, with his blade held out in front of him.

“Keh, does rule one still apply?” The shark-toothed man asked.

“Yes.”
“Keh, you’re no fun. So bossy.” He mockingly moaned before surging across the muddy field and slamming into Hanzō. His blade burst from the bandages and Konan saw the strange weapon had a mouth and it munched on Hanzō’s chakra. Kisame cackled as Hanzō retreated slightly, wary of having his chakra devoured.

Kisame grabbed Nagato around the waist and leapt back to join their little group. He deposited him on the ground and Konan reached out and pulled him to her. Tears were pouring down his cheeks as he grabbed at both her and Yahiko.

Uzu rose from her crouch and swung the parasol up to rest on her shoulder. She looked calmly over the wary shinobi who were trying to work out how she had managed to arrive without any of them seeing.

“Are you going to fight me?” She called out and the shinobi shifted uneasily. There had been rumours of a red head woman, dressed in long robes, who left all alive on a battlefield and disappeared as if she had never been there. That same woman was rumoured to have stolen artefacts from Amegakure but they had all thought it to be a myth born from the war.

“I want the red head boy.” Hanzō called back. He remained behind his men. Willing to sacrifice them for power.

“I’m afraid you can’t have him. He doesn’t want to go with you.” Uzu replied.

“You’re going to stop me from taking the brat?” Hanzō sneered. “The boy has power. I will use him to maintain my own power.”

Konan felt her paper flurrying around her at his words. How dare he?! Yugito snarled next to her.

“Leave him alone!” She yowled and blue and black flames burst out all over her body. A wave of anger pulsed over the muddy ground and sent some of the Rain shinobi racing away.

“What the -” Hanzō said but was blasted back by another burst of energy. A crater began to form around where their group was standing, and they were at the epicentre of the blast.

Kisame grinned and charged at the remaining Ame shinobi. His blade snapped and snarled, grasping at and consuming their chakra, leaving them lying on the mud without giving much resistance.

Yugito sprang forward and joined him, knocking and clawing at those who tried to defend her from Hanzō. She batted them away and slammed her leg into Hanzō. There was such power behind her blow that the man was knocked away.

Konan and Nagato watched in awe. The whole time Uzu remained next to them, watching her two children carefully.

Once Yugito had sent Hanzō flying Uzu whistled and both girl and shark-like man retreated to join her.

“I think we have made a statement.” Uzu remarked and Kisame grinned viciously. “Time for us to leave.”

Kisame reattached his strange sword to his back and leaned down, scooping Yahiko from the ground but being careful of the kunai in his side. Nagato and Konan fluttered anxiously, wary of him being taken from them. Yugito grabbed their hands and held onto both of them.
“Don’t worry. He may look a bit different but he’s a softy really.” She chirped and grinned widely at them. Konan noticed that Yugito was missing one of her front teeth. Had it been knocked out earlier? Had someone got in a blow?

“I’m losing my baby teeth.” Yugito chirped as if Konan had asked. “Have you lost all of yours? Uzu-nee says that I’ll probably lose them all fairly quickly. Do you think my adult teeth will grow in pointy like Kisame’s? I don’t think I’d look very cute with pointy teeth. You both have really pretty hair. Can I brush it later?”

The little girl was a whirlwind of energy and she smiled cutely up at Nagato and Konan. Konan looked at Uzu bewilderedly.

“Hold on tight.” Uzu said and then there was a golden bubble of light surrounding them. They vanished from the field.

All that remained was the origami fox sat in the epicentre of the crater.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Yahiko, Konan & Nagato: In which there is more food (because mama's are always about making sure their kids eat properly), Konan looses her temper and Nagato dares to interact with the grumpy 'fish boy'.

Yahiko startled awake and bolted into a sitting position.

“Konan, Nagato!” He gasped and clutched at his side. Bandages were wrapped around his ribs, thicker on the side where he had been stabbed.

“Easy kid. Lie back down or you’ll undo everything.” A large blue hand pushed him back down onto his back. He fell back easily, the pain and fear ebbing away as he relaxed. He recognised Kisame’s hand and vaguely remembered the shark man helping them.

“There. Would have been a waste of effort if you managed to reopen the wound.” Kisame said.

Yahiko realised they were in a cave. Firelight was illuminating the crevices of the roof above him and he tilted his head to see Konan and Nagato at his side. Kisame retreated from where he had been crouched at his head and leaned back against the wall, crossing his arms.

“You’re both alright?” Yahiko said weakly and looked over both Nagato and Konan. They nodded and he sighed gratefully.

“We’re fine.” Konan reassured him and Nagato reached out and held his hand. The pale boy was shaking and Yahiko squeezed his fingers around his grasp.

“I’ve finished the soup!” Yugito announced cheerfully.

“About time brat.” Kisame snarked.
“Shut up fish boy.”

“Make me.”

Yugito, on all fours wiggled before pouncing and grabbing the tall man’s arm. He sighed and held his arm away from his body, letting her swing on it. The man was a contradiction. His words implied he didn’t like the little girl but he was letting her climb all over him, like he was a climbing frame, and he caught her when she made to leap off his chest.

“Get the food ready brat.” He dropped her on the ground and she landed with an ‘oof’.

“Stop being so bossy. Just because Uzu-nee left you in charge.” Yugito pouted. “It’s not fair. I should be in charge. You’re only a few years older than me.”

“Old enough to know better.” Kisame teased.

“Matatabi is oldest, she should have been in charge.”

“That mangy cat needs to stay put. Besides only Uzu can compete with Matatabi’s age.”

Yugito rolled her eyes and began ladling soup into bowls. She carefully cared two over to where the Ame trio were and put them down on the ground. She brought a third over with three spoons and held them out to Konan.

Yahiko watched as Konan smiled gently and thanked Yugito. The blonde grinned widely, showing off the gap in her teeth.

“Is it –” Yahiko began whispering, eyeing the bowls with trepidation.

“Aww come on! You can’t be as paranoid as Kisame!” Yugito moaned. “He thought we poisoned everything too! Konan and Nagato helped me. And they watched me put everything in the pot.”

Kisame blushed and sank down next to the fire, ladling out two more bowfuls for him and Yugito.

“Come and eat kitten.”

Yugito flounced over and leaned against Kisame’s side. Upset was obvious in the way she nestled against him and he wrapped an arm around her whilst perching his bowl on his knee and scooping up mouthfuls with his free hand.

Yahiko felt slightly guilty but allowed Nagato to pull him up to rest against the other boy. Konan raised spoons filled with rich soup up to his and Nagato’s mouths, alternating between feeding them and herself.

They all sat in silence as they ate.

“Where are we?” Yahiko finally asked. Kisame grunted as he finished his bowl and put it next to him.

“We’re close to the border of Fire nation.”

“How did we get here?”

“Transportation seal. We were heading to Tea when Konan activated the transportation seal Uzu left with you.”
“What seal?” Yahiko frowned.

“The origami fox.” Konan mumbled. “I took it with us.”

“I told you to leave it behind!” Yahiko protested.

“And if I had you’d be dead!” Konan retorted. Her hands clenched at her sides. “Uzu-san came and helped us, Kisame and Yugito too. Then they helped care for your wound and have been protecting us whilst you slept. So, if I had done as you said, you’d be dead, Nagato would be forced to use his powers for Hanzō and I would be the methods of coercing him.”

Konan leapt to her feet and stormed out of the cave and into the rain. Yahiko could see trees beyond the entrance and she marched straight into them. Yugito made a sound of disapproval before grabbing a parasol and trotting out after her.

“Smooth one kid.” Kisame said. There was a reproachful note to his voice and Yahiko wilted.

* *

“He’s such an idiot!” Konan screamed as she marched. She was furious. How could he fixate on something she had done? He would have died.

Her anger fled from her as she came to an abrupt halt. Water poured down from the space between the tree foliage and she soon felt her clothes clinging to her skin. The rain stopped pounding at her down-turned head, and she looked up to see a parasol wavering above her.

Yugito was standing on tiptoes and holding the parasol up high, trying to cover Konan’s head. It was quite a strain as Konan was a fair bit taller than the little girl. She bent down and Yugito clambered onto her back, holding the parasol so that it covered them both. The water dripped down rhythmically onto the material and the repetitive sound soothed Konan’s ire.

“Feeling better Konan-nee-chan?” Yugito said. Her voice rumbled against Konan’s back.

“Hmm.” Konan replied.

“Does Yahiko-kun hate Uzu-nee?”

“Yahiko.” Konan began. “Yahiko only really trusts Nagato and me. Grown-ups haven’t been the best role models for us. And I think he’s afraid of trusting another adult.”

Yugito made a noise of agreement.

“Kisame and I didn’t have good grown ups either. I was taken from my family when I was little, and I spent nearly all the time training. Everyone was afraid of me.” Yugito said softly and Konan tightened her hands on the back of the girl’s legs, squeezing reassuringly. “Kisame said that grown-ups are scared of him because he looks different and because he’s too big and strong.”

They stood in silence for a while. Watching the rain bouncing off the ground and listening to the patter on the parasol.

“Uzu-nee isn’t like other grown-ups.”

“I know.” Konan agreed.

“Are you going to stay with us?”
“It depends on what my boys want to do.”

Yugito nuzzled her cheek against Konan’s head.

“I’d be sad if you don’t. But we can still be friends.”

Konan smiled.

“That sounds nice.”

*

Nagato watched as Kisame gathered up their bowls and took them outside to let the rain wash them out. He was surprised that the shark-like man was only a few years older than Yugito. He was so much taller and stronger than they were.

“Are you really only a few years older than Yugito?” He asked when he returned to the cave and the fire.

“Keh. There’s a gap of eight or so between us. I’m fourteen.”

“Woah. I-I-I thought you were much older.” Nagato stammered.

“Nah. I’m just big. My dad was the same from what I can remember. Mum was a tiny thing though. Said I made her look like a whale when she was pregnant.” Kisame fiddled with the bandages wrapped around his trouser legs, readjusting them.

“My mum had hair like Uzu-san.” Nagato offered.

“Keh, guess that makes you an Uzumaki kid. From what Uzu has said anyway.”

“Was your family from Uzushio?”

“I’m from Mist. Mum and Dad both died on a mission. I left a few months ago when I found out I’d been lied to. Ended up being rescued by Uzu when hunter nin were trying to catch me and take me back.” Kisame chuckled. “Seems to be Uzu’s mode of acquiring brats. Saving them from shinobi.”

Nagato held onto Yahiko’s hand and squeezed it gently. He could tell his friend was awake and listening to their conversation.

“Why are you with Uzu-san?” Nagato asked.

Kisame lifted his head to stare up at the roof of the cave. It was a while before he responded.

“She doesn’t treat me like a tool. And she doesn’t lie. Not ever. She may say that she can’t tell me everything or ask me to wait for the full answer but she hasn’t lied. I trust her.” Kisame said almost rueful. “Besides, she and the brat seem to have a death wish. They haven’t got a survival instinct. After all, we ended up in Ame because she decided to look for you three. Anyone sensible would have avoided the war zone. If I wasn’t keeping an eye on them they’d probably have caused an international incident already.”

“Kisame is such a softy!” Yugito sprang into the cave and landed on the boy’s back. He took her impact and growled.

“Shut up you little brat. Or I’ll summon my sharks and feed you to them.”
“You’d upset Uzu-nee if you did that.”

“I don’t care.”

“Yes, you do.” Yugito beamed at him as he pulled her over his shoulder and dropped her in his lap.

“Keh, shut up brat.” Nagato could see the corners of Kisame’s mouth lifting in a fond smile. He had seen his mother smiling at him like that.

Konan had shaken the parasol off and propped it up against the wall of the cave. She joined her boys and snuggled in against Nagato’s side as he lifted his arm and wrapped it around her. Yahiko opened his eyes, seeking her out.

“Sorry, Konan. I was just…” He trailed off.

Konan smiled and patted the blanket where his leg was.

“You were worried and frustrated.” She said knowingly. He blushed and looked away, pouting.

Nagato felt tension seep from him. He hated when Konan and Yahiko were at odds. They were both so stubborn sometimes.

“So, what happens now?” Yahiko turned to look at Kisame and Yugito who were playing ninja speed Janken.

“What do you mean?” Kisame frowned as he watched Yugito’s hands carefully. They were playing for the last bowl of soup in the pot and he was still hungry.

“Well, do we have to go with you?”

“Not unless you want to,”

“Seriously?”

“Mnhmm. Uzu wouldn’t make you go with us if you didn’t want to. She’s not like that.” Kisame scowled as Yugito beat him. She pulled the pot away from where it had been resting in the ashes at the edge of the fire to stay warm and used the wooden ladle to scoop up the hot liquid.

Nagato smiled as she offered her second spoonful to Kisame and the older boy slurped it up.

“Well,” Yahiko turned to look at Konan and Nagato. “What do you guys want to do?”

Konan looked over at Kisame and Yugito who were politely pretending they couldn’t hear them.

“I think, it would be nice to learn more about where we came from. We learnt much from sensei, but we have clan techniques that Uzu-san might be able to help us with.” She said softly.

“I agree.” Nagato stuttered. He hid his eyes behind his hair. “Uzu-san reminds me of my mother. She feels the same. But if you don’t want to go with them Yahiko, we don’t have to!”

Nagato tightened his hand around Yahiko’s.

“As long as I’m with you and Konan, I don’t care where we are.” Yahiko whispered. “Maybe Uzu was right about my version of peace. But maybe she wasn’t. If we go with her, maybe we can find out what peace is and how to build it?”
Nagato lifted his head and smiled at Yahiko. The orange-haired boy’s eyes widened, and his cheeks went ruddy as he realised that Nagato was just as pretty as Konan when he was happy. Konan giggled as they both looked away from each other, red spreading across their cheeks.

Konan loved her two idiots.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Yugito Part Five: We check in on our favourite Nibi Jinchuriki. Uzu leads them through the Land of Tea, the Ame trio see the ocean for the first time and Kisame shows that he is the best big brother ever.

Thanks to all those who subscribed, bookmarked, commented or gave kudos. Special thanks to A_Lyisdove63 who pointed out that Kisame is a tsundere… it's so true.
Yugito - Part Five

Chapter Summary

Yugito Part Five: We check in on our favourite Nibi Jinchuriki. Uzu leads them through the Land of Tea, the Ame trio see the ocean for the first time and Kisame shows that he is the best big brother ever.

Chapter Notes

You guys are so awesome! I've been loving all the comments, please keep letting me know what you think! And we reached over 100 Kudos and a 1000 hits which is super amazing!
Thank you all for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment. I value them all.

If anyone can think of a cute name for Uzu's family that I can use that would be fantastic. I'm thinking like the Gaang (Avatar the Last Airbender) or Team Kakashi kinda thing. The one I like best I'll incorporate into the story. At the moment I just keep writing the children, the family or the village. I want a cool name!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yugito

(Part Five)

* 

Yugito couldn’t remember ever being this happy. They had left Rain behind. The constant downpour had ceased, and she was finally dry again. She didn’t know how the Ame trio could stand living there.

Uzu-nee had come back a day after Yahiko announced that they were going to join them. She had been scouting ahead and deciding which way they were going to go next. Kisame carried Yahiko on his back for a few days, until his wound was healed enough for him to walk independently and in that time, they had finally left Rain behind.

Yugito didn’t want to go back there again, not for a long, long time.

They had been walking through Fire for several days and the sun was shining, birds were flying overhead and there was a great plain of long grass waving gently in the breeze stretching out before them.

_I want to roll in it._ Matatabi said wistfully in her head.

_Is it fun to roll in?_ Yugito asked. Kumo didn’t have grass like this. Their grass was tough and rough because of the rocky terrain.
“Mmm. It’s the best. Soft, green grass…” She trailed off and rolled over in Yugito’s mindscape.

“Hmm.” Yugito eyed the grass suspiciously. Uzu-nee was walking along with Nagato and Konan, Kisame plodding along at the rear and keeping a watchful eye on Yahiko who was pretending he wasn’t tired.

She gave in to temptation and rolled down the slope to roll in the grass. It tickled her face and several blades went up her nose. Matatabi purred in her head and showed her how to roll properly (just like a real cat).

*I don’t think its quite as good for humans as it is for cats.* She said sadly.

*Mmm. Apparently not. But thank you kitten.* Matatabi licked her cheek.

Uzu-nee leaned over Yugito and she blinked up as the woman’s hair glowed in the sunlight as it fell and hid Yugito in a curtain of crimson. Yugito grabbed gently at several strands and wound them through her fingers.

“Practicing being a cat, kitten?” Uzu-nee teased.

“Mmhm.” Yugito affirmed. “Matatabi wanted to roll in it. We agreed it doesn’t feel as good for humans.”

Uzu-nee tipped her head back and laughed loudly.

The Ame trio were standing behind her, watching curiously.

“Who’s Matatabi?” Yahiko demanded.

Uzu-nee’s laughter trailed off and she looked down at Yugito. The little blonde looked back at her with a wary expression.

“It’s up to you Yugito-chan. It’s your decision.”

Kisame shifted behind Yahiko and he turned to scowl slightly at the older boy.

“Matatabi is….” Yugito began and faltered. She stood up, pressing her back against Uzu-nee’s legs, seeking comfort and strength from the woman.

“Matatabi is the Two-Tails. One of the Bijuu. I’m her Jinchūriki. She’s sealed inside me and I can use her chakra to do things and she keeps me safe.”

Nagato’s eyes widened. “The Two-Tails?”

“Yeah. But I’m not the Nibi.” Yugito added. Her face was blank as she watched for their reaction.


Yugito’s whole face lit up at the older girl’s words and she leapt over to wrap her waist in a hug.

“Thanks Konan-nee-chan.”

Yahiko shrugged. “The Bijuu helped us didn’t it? When we were in Rain, when Hanzō said he wanted Nagato. It helped you kick him and made the crater.”

“She did.” Yugito corrected gently. “She says you’re welcome.”
“You must be really strong Yugito-chan.” Nagato said. “Strong enough to hold a Bijuu inside you.”
Yugito blushed. “I’m not that strong. Matatabi makes me strong.”
“I think you must need a different kind of strength to be a Jinchūriki.” He replied.
Yugito smiled and grabbed his hand, squeezing it gently.
“Thanks, Nagato-nii-kun.”
Kisame groaned. “All this mushy stuff is making me feel hungry. Can we get a move on? I want to get some sushi in the next town.”
“Shut up fish boy!” Yugito snapped.
“Shut it, brat.”
“Children.” Uzu said warningly and the two fell into a staring competition. Uzu rolled her eyes and gestured for the Ame trio to start walking. They ignored the girl and the boy until the pair came racing past, Yugito cackling as she held aloft an apple, she had swiped from Kisame’s pack.
“Get back here brat! And don’t you dare eat my apple!”
“Catch me if you can fish boy!”
*
Yugito loved her new family. Yahiko and Nagato were like older brothers (like Kisame but not as stupid as him) and Konan was like a sister. She enjoyed the evenings when they would all pile together and listen to stories about Uzushio and the Ame trio’s parents. Uzu-nee told the best stories.

Sometimes they were sad stories though. Ones that made Yahiko grumble and mutter or Nagato cry. Konan always smelt sad after stories about her clan. It made Yugito want to wrap them all up in Matatabi’s fur.

They all seemed to enjoy the stories anyway, even if they were sad afterwards. Yugito liked the stories about the Bijuu best. She loved hearing about Matatabi and her siblings. She couldn’t wait to meet another Jinchūriki. She hoped their Bijuu was kind to them like Matatabi was to her.

She loved curling up Kisame’s lap too. And holding his hand. She always felt safe with Kisame. He had never been afraid of her, and was always ready to run around, play or teach her.

She had never had so many precious people before. She would do anything to protect her precious people. Matatabi agreed too.
*

The Land of Tea was aptly named. There were so many different types of tea available for sale. Some of the tea plants had made Yugito’s nose itch as they made their way through mountains and fields where the crops were carefully cultivated.

Uzu-nee often stopped at tea houses and played. Her songs were popular, and she made a lot of money from the wealthy residents in the towns. Kisame would often stay outside the towns and villages with Yahiko, helping the younger boy build his strength and skill back up now his wound was fully healed. Sometimes Nagato would stay and spar with them both but he often chose to
accompany Uzu-nee, sitting beside her side and singing along with her. He was a good singer. Or at least Yugito and Konan-nee-chan thought so and so did the people who gave them money and commented on how sweet he was singing along with Uzu-nee.

Nagato always blushed when someone called Uzu-nee his mother but Yugito had noticed that he sometimes called Uzu-nee ‘Uzu-kaa-san’. Konan did the same. Yugito thought about calling Uzu-nee, okaa-san but Uzu-nee didn’t feel like her okaa-san. She had, had an okaa-san. And Uzu-nee was Matatabi’s Mother so Yugito felt she was happy to call Uzu-nee as Uzu-nee. It was all very complicated but Yugito didn’t think Uzu-nee really minded what she was called. She even let Kisame call her bossy sometimes.

When Uzu-nee was playing Konan and Yugito would set up a blanket nearby and sell hair sticks, pins and other jewellery they had made out of Konan’s origami. They didn’t use Konan’s special paper but Uzu-nee had bought them reams of paper and given Konan a book from the Yayoi clan (Konan’s clan and it was awesome that Konan had a clan) on more intricate origami models. The older girl was superb at folding the paper. Yugito wasn’t as good but she was good at finding sticks to sand down and making beads and extra bits from rocks and wood to add to the hair sticks and jewellery Konan made.

As they made their way deeper into Tea Uzu-nee would sometimes get quieter, as if she was listening for something. Yugito always stopped to listen too but nothing ever seemed to change in the air or around them. It would make Uzu-nee behave differently however and several times they changed direction after one of Uzu-nee’s long listening pauses.

“Do you know where we’re going?” Kisame had asked once.

Uzu-nee just shrugged.

“I’m just following a feeling.”

“Keh, that’s a no then.”

Eventually they were heading towards the sea. Yugito could smell the salty air and Kisame grinned happily. After consulting the map, they had realised Uzu-nee was leading them towards one of the main seaports in Tea where ships brought and sold away with items to trade.

Yahiko, Nagato and Konan were all excited. They had never seen the sea before. When they crested a hill and the ocean rose out to the horizon Yugito watched excitedly as all three stared in awe.

“It’s so big.” Konan-nee-chan murmured.

“I’ve never seen so much water.” Yahiko agreed.

“You lived in a country where it rained almost solidly for nine months of the year.” Kisame said.

“Yeah, but that’s rain. This is – this is the sea.” Yahiko protested. Nagato agreed fervently nodding his head up and down.

“Let’s go down to the beach before we head into town.” Uzu-nee suggested.

Kisame whooped and charged on ahead, leaving the rest of them to run after him. Yugito watched as he all but abandoned Samehada on the sand stripped off until he was down to his underwear.

The other two boys stripped off too and trotted over to poke at the sea with their toes. They yelped
as they discovered it was surprisingly cold before trotting in slightly deeper and starting a water fight.

Konan was a bit more considerate about going into the water but she gamely joined the boys, her shorts and breast band covering her body as she danced away from the surf and leapt over the waves that kissed the shore.

Yugito was slower to remove her clothing. She knew that the seal for Matatabi would be visible and she tightened her fist in her mesh shirt, reluctant to take it off.

“You can wear this if you want Yugito-chan.” Uzu-nee had pulled the clothing scroll from her arm and extracted a one-piece bathing suit from it. The girl smiled gratefully and hid behind Uzu-nee’s sleeve as she changed into it. She pulled the origami hair pins from her hair afterwards and placed them carefully on her folded clothes.

Uzu-nee pulled her hair up and used ribbons to tie it up into two high ponytails on either side of her head.

“There you go. All sorted.” Uzu-nee patted her gently on the back and Yugito trotted down to the break between dry and wet sand.

Will I like it Matatabi? Yugito asked her Bijuu. The cat giggled.

The ocean is full of fish. Even I like it. See if you can find some pretty shells if you’re worried about going in the water. Then, when Kisame has finished showing off you can ask him to help you. The Nibi said practically.

Yugito followed Matatabi’s advice and gathered up a selection of shiny and spiralling shells. She made a pile of them far from the water’s grasp and gradually made her way deeper into the water.

Kisame had finished swimming and floated over to where she was standing and looking at the water lapping at her calves with trepidation.

“Allright there, kitten?” He said softly.

“I’ve never been in the sea on my own.” She said and looked up at him. He smiled softly; his whole body feeling gentle.

“Make like a monkey, kitten.” He told her and turned to crouch down and offer her his back. She scrambled on and he slowly waded out into deeper water until only their heads were above the surface.

He didn’t let go the whole time.

“Wow.” Yugito said as he gently floated along, his legs keeping them above the water. “It looks like the sea and the sky go on forever.

“Hmm.” Kisame agreed.

Yugito tightened her arms around his neck and kissed his cheek gently. They said nothing more but floated and enjoyed the clouds until the sun began to set.

*
Next Chapter - Interlude One: The gang arrives in a port town. They search for a survivor from Uzushiogakure and Uzu makes some music. The village grows.
Interlude One - The Dancer

Chapter Summary

Interlude One - The Dancer: Uzu's family arrives in a port town. They search for a survivor from Uzushiogakure and Uzu makes some music. The village grows.

Chapter Notes

Because I was up late last night when the police raided the house opposite and kept me awake, you get two updates tonight!
So I hope you enjoy Interlude One - The Dancer

Note that Hotaru is not Utakata's Hotaru. I just like the name so I used it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Interlude One

(Dancer)

*

Uzu let her foundlings play at the beach for the remainder of the afternoon. She only called them back when the sun began to set. She had prepared towels for them all and handed the Ame trio a change of clothing.

“It’s colder on the coast when the sun goes down.” She explained. “And we need to blend in a bit more. There aren’t many shinobi in the Land of Tea and this port is primarily a merchant town. Travelling civilians will be less likely to attract attention.”

“What about Kisame?” Yugito said through chattering teeth as Uzu rubbed the towel over her hair.

“Keh. There’s nothing wrong with me brat. I’ll just wear my hood up.”

“That’s totally not going to work.” Yahiko said with a pained look. “You’ll look even more suspicious.”

Uzu laughed brightly.

“Kisame will be fine. If anyone asks, we can just say that he’s a bodyguard we hired.”

Kisame puffed up at the compliment.

*

They entered the port just as the sun finally set. A few quick queries and they were given directions to a decent inn on the outskirts of the town.
“Everyone’s so friendly.” Konan whispered. “Are they not affected by the war?”

“Keh, the war has an impact everywhere kid.” Kisame said and crossed his arms over his chest. “But the Land of Tea is far enough from the battlefield that fighting doesn’t happen within its borders. The main issue here is that their trade routes over land have been affected and they have to hire shinobi to guard caravans if they want to use land routes. But this coastal port allows them to send goods all over the nations and avoid the conflict between the great nations fairly easily.”

“Hmm.” Konan hummed and smiled up at Kisame, thanking him for answering her question.

Uzu had got them a single large room at the inn and they traipsed upstairs, tired from playing in the ocean and from the long days of travel before. The room was large enough for all of them to fit in comfortably with plenty of room for futons.

“Kisame, would you take Nagato and Yahiko and make use of the baths?” Uzu requested. He grunted and propped Samehada against the wall by the window. Although he didn’t like to be parted from the blade it would be better protecting the window, the main weakness in their room whilst he was gone.

When the boys had gone, Yahiko and Nagato eager to wash off the smell of brine and the salt that had dried on their skin, Uzu ordered food to be sent up to the room and began to play her shamisen quietly whilst Konan and Yugito sorted out the shells and rocks that they had collected.

After everyone had bathed, including the girls and Uzu (and Konan and Yugito had delighted in the scented soaps provided by the inn), they ate before Yugito started nodding off into her food. They all quietly tidied up, stacking bowls and putting them on trays outside the door to be collected by the staff, as Uzu laid out the futons and slipped Yugito under the blankets.

Konan and Nagato followed shortly after and fell asleep next to the little blonde.

Yahiko however remained stubbornly awake.

“Why are we here Uzu-san?” He asked.

“I’m looking for someone.”

“Who?”

“She was a teenager when Uzushio fell. A child from a branch of the Uzumaki and Fuuma, funnily enough. She was training to be a dancer.”

Yahiko’s eyes widened.

“Is she related to me and Nagato?”

“A cousin several times removed.”

“Cool!”

Uzu grinned. “Cool, indeed.”

“How do you know she’s here?” Yahiko frowned. “We’ve been wandering around for weeks in Tea and you suddenly changed direction several times.”

“I can feel where all my children are.” Uzu rubbed at a spot in the centre of her chest thoughtfully. “It’s like a pull, a magnet. The feeling gets stronger, like being tugged along by a rope, when I get
It’s how I found you, Nagato and Konan.”

“Huh. I did wonder.” He shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t really understand but I trust you Uzu-kaa-san.”

Uzu’s face lit up in delight and she grabbed Yahiko and pulled him into her lap, hugging him tightly. The boy blushed and protested, squirming in her grasp.

“Stop! That’s not cool!”

“Keh, you wouldn’t know what cool was, kid.” Kisame teased as he watched Yahiko break free and his hair was all fluffy from his efforts.

“Shut up Kisame.” Yahiko stuck his tongue out at the older boy. Kisame snapped his teeth.

“Put it back in your head or I’ll bite it off.”

“Boys.” Uzu warned and they both gave each other grins before settling down into their futons.

Uzu took first watch and she gently played her shamisen as the children slept, the sound reaching them even in their dreams.

*

The next day they began asking around for any information on a red head dancing girl. It was surprisingly easy to find her and they were directed to the marketplace. Kisame was dragged off by Yugito and Konan when they spotted a fruit stall and he went with them, grumbling the whole time.

Nagato and Yahiko stuck close by Uzu as the woman wound her way through the labyrinth of stalls. People would admire her as she walked by and both boys heard the traders and shoppers commenting on her crimson hair and wondering if they were related to her. It made Nagato and Yahiko grin at the idea.

They came to an area on the edge of the marketplace, close to the docks where a large crowd was gathered and music was playing. Yahiko and Nagato wormed their way through the crowd, pulling Uzu along with them until they reached the front and saw the dancer.

Her hair was long, but not as long as Uzu’s, and was the same shade as Nagato’s. The two boys watched in awe as she leapt, twirled and pirouetted, trailing lengths of cloth behind her. The crowd was clapping in time to the music and they sped up as she spun faster and faster before coming to a stop on her knees with her body bent backward so her head was on the ground and her arms stretched out to either side.

A couple of men ran around amongst the crowd with cups, collecting coins for the performance. Nagato and Yahiko watched as the dance rose up onto her knees and grinned happily at the sight of the pleased crowd. They felt Uzu lift her shamisen off her shoulder and kneel down onto the ground to play. They sank down to join her and Yahiko leaned into Nagato’s side.

The crowd fell silent as Uzu strummed her shamisen, tuning it swiftly and professionally. The dancer glanced back at the musicians who were sat behind her. One of them pointed to Uzu and she spun just as Uzu began playing a traditional Uzushiogakure melody. The dancer’s eyes widened and she ran over to the musicians and grabbed a parasol from a pile of props before returning to the centre of the dance space.
Uzu repeated the initial verse before speeding up and beginning the song proper. Nagato and Yahiko watched in awe as she moved, using the parasol as if it were a sword. They could recognise some of the stances as moves from taijutsu. The parasol remained closed for half the song, arching out and flowing like a blade as the dancer wielded it. Then Uzu changed the melody, slipping into something more mournful and slow.

The dancer opened the parasol and her steps become slower, the moves more exaggerated and drawn out. She held the parasol out in front of her and spun it, the open material spinning a pattern of cherry blossoms in a circle, blending into a flow of pale pink.

She finished with the parasol tucked over her shoulder and her head dropped down, red hair streaming over her front.

The crowd clapped enthusiastically and the two men rushed around to collect coins again.

The dancer ignored everyone to scurry over to Uzu. She dropped heavily to her knees. Her breath was coming out in harsh pants and sweat was dripping down her face.

“Hello Hotaru-chan.” Uzu said.

The woman’s eyes widened and sheer delight spread over her face. She fell into a bow in front of Uzu, her forehead pressed into the flag stones.

“Uzushio-sama!” She looked up as if she couldn’t believe her eyes.

“You have grown up well, Hotaru-chan. I am pleased.”

“Thank you Uzushio-sama.” The dancer rose to her feet and gestured for Uzu and her boys to follow. She led them past the musicians and into a mochi shop at the edge of the marketplace. Hotaru collapsed onto a seat at a table and Uzu slipped onto the bench opposite, Nagato and Yahiko nestled on either side of her.

“Please call me Uzu.” Uzu said before Hotaru could speak again.

“Uzu-sama. How are you here?” Hotaru asked.

“How do you know who she is?” Yahiko asked before Uzu could reply. Hotaru suddenly seemed to take in the two children either side of Uzu and her eyes widened once more.

“You’re an Uzumaki and a Fuuma.” She said. A laugh burst from her mouth and she clapped a hand over it to trap the sound. A few tears escaped her eyes and Yahiko waved his hands flustered.

“I didn’t mean to make you cry!” He said.

“I’m just happy. A few of us made our way to Tea after... We haven’t seen anyone else since.” Hotaru explained and wiped the tears from her cheeks. A portly young man made his way over to their table and leaned over Hotaru’s shoulder to peer at her face.

“Are you alright Hotaru?” He asked worriedly, sparing a glance for the dancer’s teammates.

“This is Uzu-sama.” Hotaru said. “She is the one who saved us all when we were children. Uzu-sama, this is my fiancé Kenji.”

“A pleasure to meet you Kenji-san. Congratulations to the both of you.”

Hotaru grinned at Uzu.
“Kenji-kun makes the best mochi.” Her fiancé blushed and smiled. “I’ll bring some out for you Hotaru-chan. Uzu-sama, would your two companions like some?”

“That would be lovely, thank you Kenji-san.”

The portly young man bustled back to the counter and began shifting plates around. Hotaru stared after him with a fond expression.

“You are happy Hotaru-chan?”

She looked back at Uzu and her grin spread so much that her eyes almost shut with the force.

“Very.”

“I’m glad.”

“Are you looking for the others? We usually meet up once a week for drinks. There was a whole group of us who ended up in the same town after… Well, we stayed together and earned money through odd jobs. Now we are all settled in this town. I travel around to perform but once I marry Kenji-kun I’ll settle down and perform here.” Hotaru babbled excitedly.

“I am looking for others. All of you who were transported away.”

Yahiko pouted. “You didn’t explain how you knew who Uzu-kaa-chan was!”

Hotaru chuckled sheepishly before leaning over the table and gesturing for Nagato and Yahiko to come closer.

“Anyone born or who lived on Uzushio knows that Uzushio is alive. She speaks to us. Tells us when the winds are right to fly, when the whirlpools are shifting, when a storm is coming, when the fruit is ripe. She tells children who can’t sleep of stories from long, long ago. I knew who she was because she feels and sounds the same as the Uzushio of my childhood. I can’t really explain it better than that. It’s instinctive. You guys probably felt the same, deep down, even though you weren’t born on Uzushio. You’re a Fuuma and an Uzumaki.”

Hotaru grinned. “Uzushio and Uzu-sama are in your blood. That makes you family.”

* 

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Hotaru - means firefly
Kenji - means intelligent second son, strong and vigorous

Next Chapter (which will be posted literally minutes after this one) - Utakata Part One:
It's Yugito's birthday and she wants to spend it at the beach. Uzu finds a chibi slug Jinchuriki and Kisame adds another brat to his siblings.
Utakata - Part One

Chapter Summary

Utakata Part One:
It's Yugito's birthday and she wants to spend it at the beach. Uzu finds a chibi slug Jinchuriki and Kisame adds another brat to his siblings.

Chapter Notes

If you haven't read chapter 20 go back and read it! This one is the second posted tonight so you might be a bit confused otherwise!

Read it? Okay, continue onward loyal reader!

P.S. Thanks for the bookmarks, subscriptions, kudos and comments. They make my cold heart beat. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Utakata

(Part One)

*

They stayed in the port town in Tea for over a week. Uzu introduced her new children to the refugees from Uzushio. Several of them were grown adults now, with families and children of their own. They had all recognised Uzu instinctively, even the youngest baby who wasn't even talking yet.

Yugito had been fascinated by the baby cradled in Uzu’s arms. She had never been allowed that close to one before, not after Matatabi.

Uzu was the one who announced that they had to move on. She was met with protests from all the refugees.

“I have more children to find. If you need me, send for me with the seal I gave each of you. Otherwise, continue to live happy and full lives. When I return to the island, I will send word and if you want to come back then you will be welcome. You and your families.” Uzu had smiled gently and embraced each and every one of them.

The port slowly shrank behind them as they continued on their journey, fading until it was lost in the glare of the sunlight on the ocean.

“Are we going to Uzushio?” Nagato asked.

“Not yet. We have more children to find. And there’s one close. One who I haven’t seen in
centuries.” Uzu replied, her eyes fixed on the horizon.

“Keh, please don’t let it be another brat. We have too many already.” Kisame said.

“You’re not old enough to not be a brat too!” Yahiko barked and dodged, grinning cheekily as Kisame flung a dango stick at him. Nagato joined in the roughhousing, tripping Yahiko over and then high-fiving Kisame. Yugito scampered around the three boys and launched herself at Kisame, clinging onto Samehada and scrambling up the blade until she could tuck herself in between the blade and Kisame’s head. Her legs hung down either side of his neck and she held onto his hair with her fingers.

He sighed but left her there as they walked on. Konan made some blue birds and sent them chasing Yahiko and Nagato. The two boys yelped and dodged and contorted as the birds charged after and dived at them.

Uzu played her shamisen and the group made their way happily along the coast, off the road for a change.

*

Uzu led them back through the Land of Fire but remained along the coast. It had been well over a year now since she liberated Yugito from Kumo and on the girl’s birthday they stopped in a coastal village to celebrate. They spent the day on the beach and each of Yugito’s new siblings gave her a present of some sort or another.

Whilst the children were playing on the beach Uzu alternated between watching them and staring further down the shore towards a rockier area. Someone was watching them, and she had a suspicion as to whom it was.

A shriek of joy from Konan made her look back at the Ame trio who had ganged up on Kisame and Yugito and managed to bring the large boy to his knees in the water. Kisame launched up with Yahiko and Konan dangling from his arms whilst Yugito pulled on Yahiko’s back, toppling the bigger child into the water.

Uzu whistled and caught Kisame’s attention. He watched her hands as she told him in code that they had a watcher and she was going to check it out. She asked him to watch the kids and keep his senses keen. He nodded briefly and sent a tendril of his chakra out to Samehada propped up on their belongings. The shark blade rumbled before it too began to keep a watch.

Satisfied Uzu rose up from the sand, dusting off the back of her hakama and picked up her parasol. She had forgone her long robes today and wore a cropped shirt with the red hakama. It was too hot for her usual garments, especially as they would be spending the day playing and celebrating. Yugito had plans to explore the rockpool area later and hakama were much easier to navigate seaweed strewn rocks in.

Uzu hummed quietly as she walked, rolling the stem of her parasol on her shoulder and making the patterned paper spin above her head. Their watcher hadn’t noticed her presence as she hugged the cliff where the beach met the land and she was able to navigate her way through the rockpools, noticing the plethora of small sea creatures and shells, and over the slimy rocks without causing alarm.

When she reached the mouth of the sea cave there was a squeak and the watcher dived into the cave, trying to hide in the shadows.
“You don’t have to worry. I’m not going to hurt you.” Uzu called and shut her parasol. She propped it on rock outside the cave. Whilst it wasn’t much of a weapon (although it did make a great shield) any shinobi or child raised around shinobi knew that you could turn even the simplest of objects into a weapon.

The sea water in the cave was much colder than outside. There was little light in the damp cave and Uzu felt her skin ripple at the cool temperature. Her hakama soaked up the frigid sea water easily and she shivered.

“Well, you’ve certainly found the coldest place around here to hide away in.” She said through chattering teeth. “My name’s Uzu. I think you know that already though.”

“If you really are who you say you are,” The child’s voice echoed off the water. Uzu knew exactly where they were hiding but she remained still. “then you should know what the Bijuu inside me is called.”

“Testing me huh? Seems like Saiken has a clever Jinchūriki.”

The water splashed as the boy came out from his hiding place. He was small, smaller than the Ame trio but only slightly bigger than Yugito. Uzu crouched down as he came towards her. He stopped a few feet away and she could hear his teeth chattering.

“Has Saiken been kind to you?”

“Yes. He told me where to find you. He said, he said that you aren’t like the shinobi in Mist. He likes my bubble jutsu and tells me stories about the other Bijuu. Saiken’s the only one who was kind to me.”

“I’m glad. Saiken always was the sweetest of my children, although he could be a bit boastful.”

“He says you shouldn’t tease him when he can’t respond.”

“My apologies.” Uzu could feel the boy shivering. “Would you like to go outside? We could sit in the sun and carry on talking?”

The child nodded and led the way out of the cave. When they got outside Uzu was surprised to see large gold eyes watching her carefully. Even though he had been hiding in the cave she could see dirt rubbed into his clothing and a smear of mud on his cheek. His hair was tangled too, as if it hadn’t been brushed for ages.

“So, why did Saiken tell you to leave?” Uzu asked and leaned back against a large boulder.

“Because my dad died. And they wanted to use me in the war.”

Uzu went still.

“Mist wanted to send you into the war?”

The boy nodded. “They aren’t doing well against the other nations. I heard them talking about sending me there so that Saiken would wipe out everyone. Saiken didn’t want to do that though. So, he told me to leave and led me to you. Your chakra is warm. Can we stay?”

Uzu smiled gently at the boy watching her with wary gold eyes.

“If that is what you want.”
He nodded and reached out to hold her hand.

“I’m Utakata.”

“Nice to meet you Utakata-kun.”

“Uzu-kaa-chan? Have you got anything to eat?” He looked up at her and she laughed lightly.

“Well luckily it’s Yugito-chan’s birthday so we have plenty of food. More than enough for six hungry children. But first, let’s get you cleaned up a bit.”

*

Uzu used some water from a flask in her storage seals to wipe away the sweat, muck and fear that clung to Utakata. The boy had stripped off the shinobi clothing he was wearing and dumped it on the ground. He held his arms out and let Uzu rub him down with careful hands.

She noticed several marks on his body. Old wounds that Saiken was slowly healing. Not many of them were wounds that would have been gained from training. These were marks she had seen on Uzushiogakure shinobi. Ones who had been tortured. She knew that they had potentially been torturing the boy to awaken Saiken. A foolish idea.

Once he was as clean as she could make him with only a flask of water and her hands, Uzu pulled the clothing scroll from her arm. He watched curiously as the scroll appeared from the glowing seal in her skin.

“Can I learn to do that?” He asked.

“If you want to.” Uzu said. She laid the scroll out and found the clothing for boys. She sat back and let Utakata paw through the pile of clothing. He dismissed most of the shinobi garb, selecting only a mesh shirt and tight grey pants. The kimono however seemed to be a hit and he delicately lifted them up, examining the patterns and embroidery. He eventually settled on a pale yellow one that faded into white and he tied it on over the mesh shirt and pants.

When she offered him sandals, he wrinkled his nose and shook his head. Uzu smiled and returned the discarded clothing to the scroll. She tossed a paper bomb on the damp clothing he had been wearing, it burst into flames leaving no trace of the Mist gear.

“Are you ready to get some food and meet the others?” Uzu asked and held her hand out. Utakata eagerly grabbed hold and followed along as she led him over and around the rockpools. She opened her parasol and he stared up at the colours on the paper as the sun shone through it.

“Will they be afraid of me?” He asked calmly but she felt his fingers tighten around hers.

“No. I can confidently say that no one will be afraid of you. In fact, you might just make Yugito-chan’s day.”

Her return did not go unnoticed by the children playing in the sea and they all promptly abandoned the waves and raced up to her.

Utakata flinched but stayed at her side, watching their approach calmly and coolly.

“Not another brat?!?” Kisame growled. “I’ll have to start charging if you keep collecting brats and leaving me to babysit.”
“We’re not babies!” Yahiko howled and charged at the older boy. Kisame ducked and caught Yahiko on his shoulder cackling as the boy yelped and flailed his legs and arms.

Utakata watched with wide eyes and looked up Uzu. She rolled her eyes and winked at him. He frowned before turning to find Yugito peering up at him. He jumped slightly.

“You feel different. Not like Kisame or Yahiko-kun, or Nagato-kun. And you don’t feel like Konan-nee-chan…” Yugito trailed off and sniffed, the tip of her nose twitching. Something in Utakata’s scent seemed to elicit an excited response and she bounced up and down, the two pigtails in her hair echoing her movement.

“Are you?! Is he Uzu-nee? Are you really?!”

“Children, let him introduce himself.” Uzu called and Kisame dumped Yahiko on the sand. The orange-haired boy grinned cheekily from his seat on the hot sand and the other two flopped down next to him.

Utakata shifted slightly, squeezing Uzu’s hand.

“T’m Utakata. I left Mist ‘cause Saiken told me Uzu-kaa-chan was nicer.”

Yugito squealed.

“T’m Yugito Nii. I left Kumo with Uzu-nee because they wanted to use Matatabi! We’re the same!”

Utakata’s eyes widened.

“You’re the Nibi Jinchūriki?”

Yugito launched herself at him and hugged him, rubbing her cheek on his face.

“Best present ever!”

*

Chapter End Notes

I don't think Yugito understands how presents work... But she's just soo cute!

Next Chapter - Utakata Part Two: In which Utakata takes lots of naps and Uzu leads her children home. Utakata also demonstrates his heartbreaker potential.
Chapter Summary

In which Utakata takes lots of naps and Uzu leads her children home. Utakata also demonstrates his heartbreaker potential.

Chapter Notes

You guys are amazing. Seriously. Thanks to you all for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments. Shout out to Chirolite for their detailed comments. Comments and kudos do matter!

Before you dive into Utakata - Part Two, what are your opinions on the Uchiha massacre? Do I let it happen or not? I've got two ideas for massacre and non-massacre so I want to know what you guys think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Utakata

(Part Two)

*

Other children could be incredibly noisy. Utakata wasn’t sure he liked such a fuss, it made it hard to nap. He liked playing with Yugito, Yahiko, Konan and Kisame but they were always so loud. And they made him run around lots. He preferred sitting with Nagato. The older boy would join in with the play but he too preferred to have some quiet time. Utakata liked sitting with Nagato because even though the older boy didn’t take naps like he did, he would sing quietly to himself, and the sound of Nagato singing reminded Utakata when he woke from bad dreams that he wasn’t in Mist anymore. It was comforting.

Uzu was the best place to take a nap. The woman would sit down quietly, leaning against a rock, a tree, their packs and Utakata would lean back against her stomach and nap quietly. She was soft, but not too soft but not hard like Kisame. The blue boy wasn’t very comfy for napping on but if Uzu wasn’t available and Kisame wasn’t busy he would let Utakata have his nap on him. Sometimes he would even join in.

Kisame snored really loudly and Utakata liked pressing his ear and listening to the sound rumbling through the boy’s body. It sounded a bit like thunder sometimes.

Utakata wasn’t used to being allowed to sleep when he was tired in the middle of the day. The first time he had fallen asleep with his new family he had woken up terrified and apologising frantically. Yahiko and Nagato had looked at him weirdly but Yugito had patted his hand and told
him he didn’t need to say sorry. Then she had curled up with him, saying that she wanted a cat nap (she also asked if Saiken liked napping like Matatabi. It was nice to have someone else to talk to who understood exactly what it was like having another being living inside you).

Since joining Uzu, Utakata had been able to sleep better and his afternoon naps grew shorter and shorter. Uzu said that he was just the kind of person who needed more sleep than others and that his body was catching up on the rest it had been deprived of. Utakata found that he was able to walk and play for longer without getting as tired as before.

It was nice to not be told off for sleeping too much.

*

Uzu had led them round the coast and eventually they had ended up at a small coastal village. There was a mixture of people there. Most were long time residents, fishermen whose families had lived in the same spot for generations. Utakata and Nagato liked listening to the songs they sang as they unloaded fish, gut and boxed them up in salt. Nagato had easily learnt some of the songs and could be heard humming or singing them throughout the day.

The other residents were not generational fishermen. These were families who had escaped the Fall of Uzushiogakure and returned as close as they could to the island. They had all recognised Uzu when they arrived in the village and Utakata had hovered alongside the rest of her children as she was swarmed by tearful adults.

They spent a week in the village, Uzu promising that when the time was right, she would help the displaced citizens return to Uzushio. Several of the villagers wanted her to return them to the island straight away. Uzu refused, explaining that without shinobi to support and sustain the village they would find it difficult to thrive. Utakata heard some of the younger adults muttering mulishly but the elders accepted Uzu’s decision with some sorrow.

Utakata liked watching Uzu. She was strong in will but kind when she spoke. She didn’t get angry and shout, even when other people were shouting at her. She was calming but rarely still. He had seen her scooping up Yugito and tickling the young girl until she cried with laughter, stealing Samehada off Kisame and running off to hide the blade somewhere and laughing at him scowling from halfway up a tree as he tried to retrieve the blade, pinning Yahiko down to brush his wiry tangled hair, dancing with Konan in the middle of the beach and spinning Nagato round and round until the red head looked as if he might be sick.

She was a contradiction, but unlike other things that contradicted and made Utakata feel sick (like the warmth of blood as it sprayed on his skin, the cold kiss of steel, the firm but slippery feeling of raw muscles) Uzu was a good contradiction. He could sense her tempestuous nature. Her very chakra felt like the world around him and he knew (because Saiken had told him) that nature could be both beautiful and warm, but also wild and untameable.

*

Utakata held Uzu’s hand whilst Nagato held her other. Their group was standing a few miles down from the village and staring out over the ocean where the whirlpools danced. They had left early that morning, slipping from the village as the sea fog began to be illuminated by the rising sun, disappearing like spirits into swirling grey.

Now they were all looking towards an equally, if not thicker fog bank that lay over the furthest whirlpools.
“Is that Uzushio?” Konan asked softly.

“Beyond the whirlpools and behind the fog, yes.” Uzu smiled down at them all (except Kisame because he was taller than Uzu).

“Why are we going there Uzu-kaa-san?” Yahiko frowned. “Is it safe?”

Uzu hummed contemplatively.

“You will be safe with me at your side. I am part of Uzushio so the whirlpools and fog will obey me. And we’re going there because I want to try and alter Utakata-kun and Yugito-chan’s seals. Saiken and Matatabi deserve to have more freedom, and the current seals they are trapped behind are not good for either the Bijuu or the Jinchūriki.” She explained.

“Sounds good to me!” Yugito chirped and flung herself onto Kisame’s shoulders. Utakata looked up at Uzu and the woman bent down and scooped him up, cradling him on her hip. His hands reached out and clenched the fabric of her robes tightly.

“Happier there Utakata-kun?” She asked softly. He nodded shyly and relaxed into her hold. She was so warm.

Konan linked arms with Nagato and Yahiko and they followed along as Uzu led the way out onto the churning sea. Kisame led up the rear, ready to grab the trio if necessary. The nearer they got to the whirlpools the tighter Yugito clenched Kisame’s hair, but he didn’t complain. Whilst she wasn’t afraid of water, the spinning whirlpools were enough to give anyone pause.

Utakata felt his jaw drop as the whirlpools seemed to shift and move out of their way. A path opened up, winding around and between the whirlpools and Utakata could see down to the seabed at the bottom of some of them. There were specks of red sand glinting on black rocks and the pungent odour of the seaweed that clung to them wafted up in the whirlpools’ draft.

“Cool!” Nagato cried and pointed down at a turtle that was winding its way along the whirlpools. “How come he hasn’t been sucked into the whirlpool?”

“She is an old turtle and knows how to read the whirlpools. She hatched in the beach of Uzushio and her first day in the ocean was spent learning how to ride the currents and where the safe places are in the whirlpool.” Uzu explained.

“Wow.” Konan peered at the turtle that seemed almost as if she was leading them. “Where’s she going now?”

“To check on her eggs. It isn’t normal for sea turtles to ever see their offspring, but this old lady is a bit special. She likes to watch her hatchlings make their way to the sea. Uzushio has an interesting effect on the animals. They aren’t like the ones on the mainland.”

Utakata stretched out a hand to let the fog tickle his skin. It was cool and refreshing.

*I loved playing hide and seek in the fog.* Saiken crooned in his head.

*I’ve never played hide and seek.* Utakata frowned.

*We can play if Mother frees me. And I bet the others would play if you asked.*

The fog bank broke suddenly and Utakata blinked in the sunlight. Once the sting from the bright light had eased he stared at the island that soared in front of them. Sea birds were wheeling in the
The waves were lapping at the red sand and a mountain covered in grass and small trees dominated the land. Uzushio was an island of hills and dales, soaring cliffs and deep groves of fruit trees.

The Ame trio whooped and ran ahead with Yugito squirming off Kisame’s shoulders and chasing after them.

“This is you?” Kisame looked down at Uzu. She smiled up at him.

“What do you think?”

“You’re different to Mist.”

Her head tipped back, and her laugh vibrated against Utakata’s chest. The sound rumbled through him and it made him want to smile.

“I’ve never been to Mist. I’ll have to visit sometime and compare it.” She teased.

“I think you’re pretty.” Utakata offered and smiled tentatively as Uzu turned her attention to him. Her eyes took in his smile and her whole body seemed to soften.

“This one’s a smooth talker huh?” Kisame reached over Uzu and tousled Utakata’s hair.

“Saiken has obviously taught him how to talk to a woman. If only you had the same skills.” Uzu said almost mournfully. Utakata giggled as Kisame scowled.

“So, you say.”

“Shut up, witch.” Kisame scowled but Utakata knew he was faking. It was nice to be with people who didn’t hide their emotions all the time, or only showed their anger, fear and hatred.

“Let’s go. I don’t want the younger ones going into the village on their own.” Uzu continued walking over the water to the beach where Yugito and the others were running around and pointing at different things.

“Is it safe?” Kisame asked.

“As safe as I could make it on my own. I wasn’t able to do much. It took me days to lay my children to rest. The village itself has been partially reclaimed by the plants. The animals leave it alone though. There is a lingering sense of sorrow which they can feel. But, there were a few properties closest to the mountain that avoided destruction. We will use one of those as our home whilst we are here.”

Kisame grunted and strode along. Utakata wound one hand into Uzu’s hair and tugged gently. He could see her face had tightened slightly, her smile smaller and thinner. She looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

“Does that sound good Utakata-kun?”

He nodded and summoned his courage, leaning in and pressing a kiss to her cheek. Her smile grew again.

“Thank you, sweetheart.”
“Keh, definitely going to be a heartbreaker when you grow up kid.” Kisame eyed Utakata.

The boy stuck his tongue out before nestling back against Uzu.

This island felt like Uzu, it felt like home.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Utakata Part Three: Utakata learns what it is like to be a child. Uzu admonishes crappy Bijuu seals. Utakata and Yugito get a choice and Saiken makes a friend.
Utakata - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Utakata Part Three: Utakata learns what it is like to be a child. Uzu admonishes crappy Bijuu seals. Utakata and Yugito get a choice and Saiken makes a friend.

Chapter Notes

You guys are as awesome as ever. Thanks for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Utakata

(Part Three)

*

Uzushio was like paradise. Utakata and the other children had explored every inch of the island they could reach. They picked fruit off the trees, found mushrooms in dark hollows, picked up shells and sea glass off the beach, leaned carefully over the cliffs to look down and watch the fledglings’ first flight, hid in the trees to watch the deer delicately pick their way amongst the trees and run from the boar families when they accidentally stumbled on them.

Uzu and Kisame had been busy the first few days, setting up the house they had decided was safe enough to use. They had gathered up materials to make futons and salvaged furniture from other houses. After the house was liveable Uzu had turned her attention to studying Utakata’s and Yugito’s seals.

Utakata had been glad that Kisame had taken the Ame trio to go fishing when Uzu asked to look at the seals. He didn’t mind Nagato, Konan or Yugito knowing that he was a Jinchuriki or that he had Saiken trapped inside him but exposing the seal made him feel cold and his heart would race frantically.

Yugito said that she felt similarly. Her palms would get sweaty, but her mouth would go bone dry.

Uzu had carefully copied out their seals onto scrolls, her brush flowing and her eyes glancing at every detail of the seal. She had also copied the seals when they accessed their Bijuu’s chakra. There were slight differences in them when the Bijuu’s chakra was being used.

Utakata’s seal was more intricate than Yugito’s. There were more lines that came out from the centre and his had more kanji on it. He thought Yugito’s was less obvious however, her seal was done in purple ink and when it was inactive it looked as if it could be clan markings or an odd tattoo.
Uzu hadn’t been impressed with either of their seals. Utakata and Yugito had both giggled at the derogatory words she used about the techniques of Mist and Lightening.

“Amateurs. Such crude work. This would be better sealing a piece of rotted wood. Absolute crap!”

She tossed the scrolls to the side and yanked both Yugito and Utakata into her lap, toppling backwards so that they were forced to fall on top of her, squealing as they fell. They lay on top of her and Utakata’s head was pressed over her heart. He listened to the steady thud as it worked, and he watched Yugito nuzzle into Uzu’s stomach.

“It will take a bit of time, but I think I can alter the seals. On both of you.” Uzu eventually announced.

Both Jinchūriki went still.

“I will need to study the copies I made of your seals, and I’ll probably have to look at the real things several times too. Then I will be able to change them so that Matatabi and Saiken can take form outside your bodies. I can’t pull them out. When a Bijuu is extracted from their Jinchūriki the Jinchūriki always dies. Your bodies are intrinsically linked. You cannot survive the extraction process or the sudden absence of the Bijuu’s chakra.”

Yugito frowned.

“Will Matatabi be able to move about and speak to you without having to take over my body?”

Uzu made a noise of agreement.

“Matatabi and Saiken would be able to manifest as their original forms, beings outside your bodies. But their chakra would still be tethered to you. Think of it a bit like a kite on a string. The Bijuu is the kite, flying in the sky and their chakra is the string, held in your hand.”

Utakata breathed in tremulously. He had always been told that letting the Six Tails out was bad. That he shouldn’t let it out because it would destroy everything. He had also been told not to listen to Saiken but Saiken had been kind. And the slug had been the one to help him when Mist contradicted themselves and wanted to provoke the Bijuu into forming. It was hard to know what was right. He didn’t know what he wanted to do.

“It is your decision.” Uzu said. “Whilst I understand that Matatabi would definitely like to be able to move freely and Saiken probably would too, they have been sealed inside you. You need to decide if you want the seal altered. Once I’ve changed it then you would not be able to confine them inside you anymore.”

A shiver ran down Utakata’s spine. Saiken remained silent in his head. He could see Yugito biting her lip and clenching Uzu’s robes in her small hand.

They lay silently for a while, listening to the breeze rustling the strings of origami Konan had made to hang on the engawa, marking their home and bringing a bit of colour into it. A furin bell they had found on one of their explorations rang in the same breeze and they could hear the birds singing in the tree in the garden. For a short while, Utakata could forget he was a Jinchūriki and push the heavy thoughts to the back of his mind.

“I believe that giving Matatabi and Saiken freedom to move more independently outside of your body could actually strengthen your relationship and abilities. You would be able to fight alongside them, as a pair, not just drawing on their chakra and having their form but having a partner, a comrade, a friend. Besides, when has a cage ever encouraged friendship or loyalty?”
Saiken hummed in his head. Utakata kind of agreed. He had been caged, caged by the expectations and hatred of his village. Now he was free, and he had friends, family that he wanted to care for. He wanted to listen to Nagato sing, Uzu-kaa-chan play the shamisen, play with Yugito, practice with Yahiko, explore with Konan and learn water based jutsu from Kisame. He wanted to give them things too, like learning to braid Yugito’s hair, helping cook Yahiko’s favourite foods, making Kisame laugh, hugging Konan, watching over Nagato and waking him when he had a nightmare, making Uzu-kaa-chan smile so that she didn’t look sad all the time.

*Do you want to do things like that too, Saiken?*

The slug was quiet for a time. When he spoke, his voice was softer and less boisterous than usual.

*I want to be able to feel the wind on my skin, smell the flowers, watch your bubbles soar in the sky with my own eyes. I want to be able to be a partner who can protect you and watch your back. I want to defend you and your family and mine. I think we could be great together, even if Mother didn’t alter the seal… But… I think we could be greater if we were able to separate.*

Utakata breathed slowly.

*But it is your decision, Saiken continued. I know you are afraid of me, and I admit that I have had a tense relationship with humans in the past. I’m not as bad as my oldest brother, but I have hated your kind before. Now however, with you talking to me and treating me like an individual I am happier and I don’t hate squishies anymore. Just the ones who wanted to hurt you and use me.*

Utakata, Yugito and Uzu lay there for a long time, none of them shifting until Kisame returned with Yahiko carrying the biggest fish they had ever seen, a triumphant grin on his face.

*Later that night, when everyone else was asleep Utakata stared out at the stars and thought long and hard.*

*I think I’d like it if we could be friends Saiken.*

The slug burbled happily and patted Utakata’s mental form on the head gently with one of his tails.

*I’d like that too, Uta-kun. You’d be my first friend.*

*We’re friends then.*

*Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Saiken: Utakata and Saiken bond. Uzu takes her Jinchuriki children to a secret place. There is seal altering.*
Saiken

Chapter Summary

Saiken: Utakata and Saiken bond. Uzu takes her Jinchuriki children to a secret place. There is seal altering.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! I'm loving some of the theories and ideas you are sharing with me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Saiken

*

His Jinchūriki was not a morning person. Saiken knew this from experience and watching Utakata stumble around still half-asleep whilst he got ready for training back in Mist. Mother was good though. She let Utakata wake up on his own whenever she could and the few times that she had wanted to set off early she had helped the boy get ready, fed him a quick bite to eat and then either she or Kisame carried him until he was properly awake.

It was a surprise to him when Utakata started deliberately waking up early. He had progressively begun to wake up earlier each day and now the boy was currently walking up the mountain pathway towards a bluff that the children had found on one of their explorations.

_Where are we going Uta-kun?_ Saiken inquired but a muzzy yawn was his only response.

Utakata blinked and stretched when he reached the bluff before sitting down and leaning against a boulder, his legs outstretched in front of him and his zori kicked off.

_Utakata?_ Saiken tried again.

_Just wait._ Utakata said.

Saiken settled down but his tails waved in the air and he kept a close eye on Utakata’s surroundings. He trusted Mother to protect them in both her forms, but he didn’t know why Utakata (an admitted love of sleep) had brought them here.

_Timed it perfectly._ Utakata said through another yawn. _Look Saiken._

He turned his attention out to the view that the bluff overlooked. The island stretched out before them, the village nestled against the mountain slightly behind them, groves of trees and meadows of wildflowers reaching down to the beach where the sea then stretched out as far as the eye could see. The fog bank was thinner today, a mere strip of roiling cover and even the whirlpools seemed to be slower.
But then the first rays of sun burst over the horizon. The night sky above had been bleeding
different colours as dawn approached but the first glimpse of true sunlight made Saiken’s breath
catch (not that he did breath but he knew what that feeling was like from Utakata and the sentiment
applied). The tips of the waves sparkled and reflected the light, sparkling as if brushed with
thousands of gems.

They sat in silence and watched the sunrise and listened to the animals on the island waking and
the foxes that had been out during the night returning to their dens. In one of the meadows that lay
below them colour began to burst into bloom as thousands of butterflies that had spent the night
with their wings closed against the cool temperature, spread open on the grass stalks they clung to.

Utakata hummed happily at the sight. It looked like someone had spread paint over the field and it
was awash with colours.

Wow. Saiken murmured.

Right? I remembered you said that sunrise was one of your favourite memories of Uzushio. So, I
thought you’d like to see a new one and we could share it together.

Uta-kun, thank you. Saiken said sincerely.

What are friends for? Besides, soon you’ll be able to come and watch the sunrise without needing
me to take you. Utakata said offhandedly.

You could come and watch too sometimes. If you wanted. I think I’d be pretty comfy to sit on.
Saiken offered and the boy snorted amused.

You do look like you’d be comfy, as long as I didn’t mind being covered in mucus.

I can’t help it! I’m a slug! I’m naturally sticky.

Utakata laughed aloud and the sound rang out over the meadow, startling some of the basking
butterflies into flight.

You’re such a tease Uta-kun. Saiken sulked.

Utakata grinned and shrugged his shoulders. They watched the butterflies re-settle and continue
soaking in the sunlight. The boy drew out his bubble pipe and began to blow bubbles. The opaque
orbs caught on the breeze and twisted and danced up in the air currents, startling some of the birds
who had never seen bubbles in the sky before.

They stayed there until the sun had fully risen.

Breakfast? Saiken said, he could feel how hungry Utakata was.

Hmm, I’m starving. Utakata stretched and slipped his zori back on to begin the trek back down to
the house. We’re going to have, to have a nap this afternoon.

Sounds good to me!

*

He could feel how nervous Utakata was. It had been just under a week since they watched the
sunrise together for the first time and Mother had finally said that she was ready to alter the seals
on Utakata and Yugito.
His Jinchūriki had volunteered to go first. Saiken could have burst with excitement and pride at Utakata’s bravery. The boy had seen how nervous Yugito was and decided he should be first.

*You’re really brave Uta-kun.*

The boy shrugged and tilted his head to stare at the cave Mother had led them to. The two Jinchuriki had said goodbye to a worried Konan and Nagato, and a teary-eyed Yahiko earlier that morning. Kisame had ruffled Utakata’s hair and even hugged Yugito.

Mother hadn’t anticipated any issues but thought it would be best if there were fewer squishies around. She didn’t know how Matatabi and he would react to being free for the first time. Whilst he and his sister wouldn’t deliberately harm their Jinchūriki’s siblings, there was the possibility of unintentional accidents.

“Ready Utakata? Saiken?” Mother asked and gestured to the pool of water that was luminous with gold light droplets that were moving through the water and air around them.

Saiken had been surprised when Mother led them into the island through the tunnels Son Gokū had made when he was playing with the lava, deep beyond that labyrinth of passageways to the heart of the island. Mother’s power pulsed within this place and Yugito and Utakata had both staggered slightly at the sheer magnitude of energy that Uzushio contained.

When they stepped into the chamber at the end of the tunnels in Mother’s inner sanctum, they had all heard her heartbeat. It was one thing to know that Mother was alive in a human body, but another thing entirely to be standing at the centre of her soul.

Utakata removed his kimono and waded into the water with just his grey trousers on. Mother was waiting at the centre of the pool. She too wore only red hakama and her breast bindings. Her hair had been braided and ropes of it were pinned to her head, keeping it up out of the water.

Yugito was perched in a hollow, halfway up the cavern, watching as Utakata laid back.

“Are you ready?” Mother held Utakata’s hands as he trod water and stared up at her. He nodded, his lips pressed together tightly and his nails sinking in the muscle of her hands.

*You don’t have to Uta-kun.* Saiken said but he knew that his Jinchūriki’s mind was made up.

Mother guided Utakata to lie back in the water, supporting his back and head until he was floating on the surface. Yugito smiled down at him and he took a deep breath in and exhaled.

Mother left one hand under the boy’s head, cupping his skull reassuringly, the other went to the seal exposed on his stomach. Her fingers seemed cool compared to the water surround him. Saiken burbled reassuringly in his head.

One last smile from Mother and Utakata closed his eyes, faintly able to hear her voice muttering unintelligibly as she drew on his skin. Her golden chakra sank into his body, not burning but caressing.

Saiken gasped as tendrils of her chakra appeared in Utakata’s mindscape and turned the dark cave of Utakata’s mind into an early morning sunrise. The tendrils wrapped themselves around his tails, body, and soul and gently pulled.

Within a breath Saiken was free and real. He sat on the edge of the pool, his feet tickled by the water’s edge and his tails waving wildly. He peered down into the pool where Utakata was panting and staring up at him.
They could both still feel Saiken’s chakra, connected to Utakata’s mind and body but Saiken knew he could come and go as he wanted now. The seal was altered and it felt less heavy on both Jinchūriki and Bijuu.

“Nice to meet you Uta-kun!” Saiken chirped.

The boy snorted and swam over to where Saiken held out a tail. The boy grasped it, only shuddering slightly at the mucus and shook it once.

“Nice to meet you too, Saiken.”

There was silence in the cave, except for Mother’s heartbeat before Yugito suddenly leapt from her hollow and dive bombed into the pool. She clawed her way back to the surface and pushed her wet hair from her face.

“Our turn now!” She shouted ecstatically.

Both Utakata and Saiken shared an exasperated look before breaking out into laughter.

“Little sisters huh?” Utakata murmured once they reined in their laughter.

“Hmm, they’re not that bad.” Saiken replied, gently lifting Utakata with a tail to deposit the boy on his head to watch as Mother began to alter Yugito’s seal.

“I suppose I’ll get to find out now. You better teach me how to be a good big brother.”

“Promise.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Interlude Two Village: Life on Uzushio with our foundlings growing and developing hobbies.
Chapter Summary

Interlude Two - Village
Life on Uzushio with our foundlings growing and developing hobbies.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the amazing subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! Shout out to lostindetails for the comment!

I fell down the rabbit hole of Naruto fanfiction and got hooked on Tobirama/Madara… Send help!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Interlude Two
(Village)

* 

Once Saiken and Matatabi were free the group spent several months on the island. It had been early summer when they arrived and the children spent the season running, playing, exploring and learning. Uzu was happy because they were, some of them for the first time, being children. They were safe, happy, warm and loved.

The addition of Matatabi and Saiken to their family unit didn’t phase any of them and they all soon got used to the Bijuu suddenly materialising in different sized versions. They could use as much or as little of their chakra to manifest in a solid form and whatever chakra they didn’t use remained in their Jinchūrīki.

Time passed both quickly and slowly on Uzushio. Days spent investigating bled into one another and were broken by quieter days such as during a summer storm when the sky was black with rain, thunder tearing the air and lightening illuminating the world in stark and brief moments. They had sat on the engawa and watched the storm, bundled up in blankets and munching on grilled shrimp sticks and dumplings. Kisame, the fool that he could be, had sat out in the garden and let the rain pound into his skin, his upturned face making the droplets ricochet off the hard planes of his face.

Yugito had buried herself in blankets, only her head poking out for fear of getting drenched, Matatabi in a housecat sized version of herself (using minimal chakra) curled up next to the pile of blankets and rested her head on her paws. Utakata and Saiken had been a bit more adventurous with the blanket wrapped around the boy’s shoulders and back but his bare legs and feet dangling over the step and being splashed with the rain. Saiken had ventured out into the rain (like Kisame) but was lured back onto the engawa with the promise of dumplings.
Yahiko, Nagato and Konan had all nestled into a mound of pillows and blankets with Uzu. At first the rain had reminded them of their childhood, of their war-torn land and the horrors they had endured and seen (and of Jiraiya-sensei and the happier times they had shared). But nestled against Uzu, with Konan reclining against the woman’s torso and Yahiko and Nagato nestled under arms spread like wings around them, able to hear the steady thud of her heart, feel the rise and fall of her chest and the soft hums as she sang Uzushiogakure songs in a whisper, this rain felt renewing and different.

The storm continued long into the night and at times they all drifted off into slumber before waking at a lightening flash or a particularly intense growl of thunder. The following day the air had been filled with the smell of petrichor and after a late start and a big lunch they had spent the day exploring small ponds that had formed from the rainwater and splashing in puddles.

* 

Uzu also ensured that she spent time with each of the children alone. They treasured the times with her when they were the sole focus of her attention but never begrudged the others their time with their mother or sister figure.

Konan learnt to paint her nails with Uzu. The woman had bought nail polishes when she went on a supply trip to the mainland, leaving the children safely on Uzushio, and she had splashed out on a myriad of colours. Konan enjoyed the whole ritual of bathing and then nestling in blankets and pillows with Uzu and the woman painting her toenails and fingernails. Gently holding her hand and showing her how to layer the polish just so, how to avoid clumping, what shades went best with her skin colour. Konan began to take it one step further and learnt how to paint and add shapes to her nails. The girl knew she was female and that Yahiko and Nagato saw her as a girl but there was something delightfully feminine about having pretty nails. Her boys were good and let her practice on them too, even Kisame and Utakata would sit still and let her paint them with a minimal amount of fuss. Yugito was too hyper to sit still long enough for the paint to dry and they had found the one time they managed to get a good polish on, the second she used Matatabi’s chakra to elongate her nails (whilst climbing a tree to play hide and seek) the polish was lost as her nails turned to cat claws.

Uzu had laughed at Konan’s frustration and let the girl paint her own in a deep shade of blue that was iridescent and looked purple and silver in some lights.

Nagato continued developing his love of music and learnt how to play a koto that Uzu had found in one of the old homes. The instrument had been coated in dust and the wooden frame had many chips and gouges in it. Some of the wear had been from a long life of use, but most of the damage had been from the attack. Uzu had helped him clean it, wiping away the dirt and grime and then helped him buff the sharp tears where splinters stuck out like waiting claws to stab him when he least suspect it. Then they had spent several hours polishing the wood until it shone and smelt faintly of beeswax. Restrunging the koto had been a lesson in itself and listening to the strings carefully and positioning and repositioning the bridges to get the true note he desired.

After that it had been more long hours of learning how to pluck the strings, where the notes were and how to change them. Uzu had given him fingerpicks but his fingers still cramped and ached after an intense practice session. It was all worth it however when he performed his first piece and was greeted with an effusive and proud applause from his siblings and Konan and Yahiko. He had blushed and grinned shyly but only felt spurred on to carry on practicing with Uzu.

Yugito was easiest to please as she and Uzu kept their ritual of hair brushing and maintenance but Uzu took it one step further by beginning to show Yugito how to create more intricate hairstyles.
Yugito had developed a hobby of finding and collecting hairpins and ornaments and then making her own inspired by the ones the people of Uzushiogakure had worn. Uzu helped her find the best shells on the beach, called to the birds to bring the best moulted feathers and asked the foxes to find the shiniest, prettiest stones. Then Uzu helped her shape and polish the stones, taught her how to drill through them without cracking them and then how to sew them onto threads with shells and origami made by Konan before attaching them to hair sticks. Whilst normally Yugito had an overabundance of energy spending time making hair ornaments to use in her own and Uzu’s hair was one of the few times the girl could sit still. Sitting in Uzu’s lap at the low table with their craft supplies spread out in front of them and Matatabi curled up under the table and purring softly the young Jinchūriki could remain there for hours.

Yahiko had found a more energetic way to spend time with Uzu. He had nearly given her a heart attack when she found him lurking in the Fuuma sanctuary and exploring the strange staffs that were collected in a far corner. The orange-haired boy had some skill with blades and had read about the Fuuma sanctuary from a scroll in one of the clan houses and gone investigating to find the trove of weapons. At first he had been mesmerised by the blades (after all some of them were awfully shiny and sharp) and there was a plethora of other weapons that were equally as shiny and cool-looking. The staffs had almost seemed a let down when he found them in comparison to the bladed weapons. But curiosity had caused him to investigate and he found hidden buttons and levers that caused wing and tail like attachments to spring from the shaft of the staff. When Uzu found him he was in the middle of throwing one to see if weapons sprang from it when it was thrown.

Uzu had yelped and ducked as the winged staff raced towards her. A sheepishly grinning Yahiko had run over and apologised. Uzu had merely raised an eyebrow before asking with a mischievous twinkle in her eye if he wanted to see what the staffs were actually for. Yahiko had been hooked the second he saw Uzu soaring in the sky, riding the air currents and twisting and twirling like the birds. He had heard of ninja who could fly (like the Tsuchikage) but there was a difference between using jutsu and chakra to fly and actually reading and riding the wind.

Uzu had taught him the basics and then supervised as he experimented with different staffs. She became his sounding board as he suggested changing some of the designs and questioned his theories and drafts over and over before helping him build his own. Sewing the wings had been the trickiest part, the material for them was thick and tough and forcing the sharp needle through and ensuring the stitches were tight was tricky. He had never realised how sharp a needle was until his fingers and thumbs were covered in pricks from his sewing. It was all worth it however when his new glider was done and he had far more manoeuvrability and dexterity than with the old gliders. His glider let him fold the wings in partially and manipulate different panels to gain a new wing-shape. The sea falcons had been his inspiration and after many hours watching and riding the wind with them he was able to keep up with them as they plummeted down the cliff face and pulled up mere inches from the waves. Uzu had watched each and every flight and Yahiko with his windswept hair had laughed long and hard when she picked him up and spun around with him.

Kisame for all his gruff talk, strength and love of fighting actually preferred quieter moments with Uzu. They had begun their time together with Uzu leading him away from the younger children down to the beach just before sunset. He had followed her without question as she led him into the sea and stood there, waiting. He had been surprised when the water began to glow in pearlescent shades of blue and rocks on the shore seemed to bleed with starlight after being coated by waves. Sea fireflies and bioluminescence entranced him, and he scooped up water trying to catch them. Uzu led him to lay down and swim amongst the shimmering water and he felt calm seep into his body, the urge for action trickling away.

Uzu also taught him how to make, using his strong dexterous fingers and hands to create and not
destroy (after all shinobi are tools for destruction). He found a simple pleasure in learning to cook. The food was nothing fancy but simple, good, homecooked meals and he enjoyed experimenting with the different spices and herbs Uzu brought over from a supply run. Uzu had taught him how to combine ingredients, when meat was cooked properly for human consumption (and he secretly admitted that it tasted better than when it was raw) and how to knead dough and braid it to make soft crusty bread.

It was a simple pleasure and delight in providing for his family and Kisame always offered Uzu the first taste of anything new. She was his harshest and most admirer (and he loved her for it).

Utakata was the quietest of Uzu’s children and the most content to be left alone. His naps were his main hobby, but he had become intrigued by a book of poetry that Uzu had given him. The poems were sometimes difficult to understand but he enjoyed debating their meaning with Uzu who listened to all his thoughts and rebuffed his arguments with her own. It was often the times when he was most animated. She encouraged his interest and brought him additional books of poetry and then philosophy before suggesting he write his own.

The calligraphy set she bought him took pride of place in the small room he claimed as his own study. He practiced for hours with the brushes, how to turn at just the right moment, the correct amount of pressure and his first completed poem with an accompanying illustration of an eddy hung proudly in their main room where they all gathered to eat and spend time in each other’s company. The applications of calligraphy in fuuinjutsu were secondary to his love of writing and whilst he slowly became proficient at copying seals, he always enjoyed sitting with Uzu and sharing drafts of his poems and discussing philosophy, poetry and sealing.

Uzu’s first children, her tailed beasts who had been parted from her for so long, were happy just to be with everyone. They spent a lot of time with their human family but just as much time with Mother, the island and sea and air and plants and whirlpools that was their Mother incarnate. They could sense that Uzu and Uzushio were one and had no need to spend more time with one or the other. Although they both admitted that Uzu's human form did give the best scritches and knew how to pet them better compared to Uzushio who cradled them with soil, air, sand and wave.

* 

The months passed by, summer, autumn and winter came and went with their family safe on Uzushio. Uzu was the only one who left the island, for monthly trips to the mainland to get supplies. In that time the children grew more confident and secure and the Jinchūriki solidified their bonds with their Bijuu, practicing using their chakra and entering into tailed beast and Bijuu mode with ease and less harm to them.

In this time, the Second Shinobi War ended and Uzu grew restless again, her children scattered around the world calling to her. Eventually the time came to leave Uzushio and they packed up their belongings, shut up the house they had claimed as theirs and bid farewell to Uzushio.

Uzu led them back across the whirlpools and they glanced back once as Uzushio was concealed by the fog once more. None of the children felt homesick because they knew that whether they were with Uzu or on Uzushio they had a home.

Uzu walked onwards, guided by that tugging sensation that had led her to her previously found children. There were more who needed her, and she would come.

*
Translations:
engawa - an edging strip of non-tatami-matted flooring, usually wood or bamboo. The ens may run around the rooms on the outside of the building, resembling a porch or sun room.

Next Chapter - Kabuto Part One: In which the writer says goodbye to the timeline further, Kabuto is a smart cookie and Uzu shares food because Mama's feed their kids. It's instinctive.
Chapter Summary

Kabuto Part One: In which the writer says goodbye to the timeline further, Kabuto is a smart cookie and Uzu shares food because Mamas feed their kids. It's instinctive.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments!

Content Warning for this chapter:
Starvation, hunger, bullying and adultery are all mentioned or implied. Also, Kabuto was a creepy dude in canon and I kind of admired that in the character so I've written a three-year-old version of him that is slightly less creepy (with the potential for major creepiness in the future).

You might say that three-year-olds are not as clever as my Kabuto, you would be right. There are very few three-year-olds as intelligent as my version of Kabuto. I have met a three-year-old 'genius' and they were frighteningly aware and coherent. So whilst rare, there are three-year-olds who can be as developed as my Kabuto. Besides in canon Kakashi graduated from the Academy at the age of 5 so he must have been a badass toddler (completely ignoring the fact that later he was in the same class as Obito and graduated one whole year earlier, because canon timeline is stupid).

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kabuto

(Part One)

*

He didn’t understand how adults could be so thick. Then again, maybe it wasn’t that they were thick, but he was too clever. He knew things, could see them clearly.

He knew that the baker was a liar who was sleeping with the grocer’s wife. He knew that the old man begging on the street was sick. He knew that the rains hadn’t come, and the harvest was diseased. He knew that his mother was frightened of him. He knew that his father had died in the war. He knew that honour didn’t feed you. He knew how to get food from the grocer. He knew that the baker died from eating a poisoned apple. He knew that the poison was hemlock. He knew that hemlock grew in abundance and that the grocer would pay for it with food.

Kabuto knew lots of things and he was only three.
Sometimes his brain felt too big for his head and all the things he could see, and others missed felt like they would drive him crazy. There were things he didn’t know too. Like why was his mother so scared of him? Why did the grocer’s wife had look so sad when the baker died? How did the animals know which plants were safe to eat? Why did the other children call him a freak? Why was the sky blue? Why could he see and smell and sense when people were sick? Why was his hair silver when his parent’s wasn’t? What was the disease spreading through the town and how did you stop it from getting you?

Kabuto watched and listened to try and answer his questions. He learnt more.

His hair was silver because he wasn’t related to the woman, he called mother.

The animals taught their babies how to recognise poisonous plants through smell and sight. Kabuto learnt it too from watching them.

The disease spreading through the city wasn’t natural. It was a by-product of the shinobi war that had ruined their home, just like the disease that had tainted their crops.

The children called him a freak because the adults did. They called him a freak because it wasn’t normal for a three-year-old to be so clever and aware. They called him a freak because he was different. He learnt what the twisted expression they tried to conceal with overly bright smiles and loud voices was. Fear.

Kabuto learnt that humans were instinctively afraid of something that was different and that they were like sheep. Fear was catching and if one was afraid the rest soon followed suit.

The woman he had called Mother died. The shinobi disease sapped the strength from her and the small clinic in their ruined city could do nothing. He thought he should feel sad and a tiny part of him did feel sad but the rest of him had seen how she was afraid and how she had flinched when he approached.

Kabuto knew many things, but he didn’t know how to look after himself properly. It took him a long time to learn how to heat water up to cook rice and he had burn scars from lifting the too heavy pot off the stove and catching the soft inner flesh of his arm on the searing bottom. He knew that vegetables were good for him, but he didn’t know how to cook them properly. Learning potatoes could make you sick if eaten raw was an eye-opening experience. He also learnt that without money from the woman he had called mother, it was hard to get some foods. He learnt that when times grew hard and disease savaged people and crops alike people grew even crueller. He learnt that it was safer to spend the night in the wilds with the animals and to hide his meagre food supplies in trees where the only things that could get at it where the squirrels.

Kabuto learnt that he could feel incredibly cold and that watching people die made him sad.

Kabuto learnt that no one would help him.

*  

“Gods… This place is…” Yahiko stared at the derelict city. Refuse and filth lay openly in the street. Windows had been smashed in and doors ripped off buildings. There was a pervasive stench of decay, death and poverty.

Uzu frowned from the front of their group. She knew one of her children was nearby and she worried about the state they would be in if this is what the town looked like.

“Stay here.” She ordered her children. They all immediately protested.
“I don’t know what this disease is. Konan, Nagato, Yahiko, Kisame, you are all just human and whilst Yugito and Utakata have Bijuu I’d rather not test Matatabi or Saiken’s abilities to fight off disease. I am not human, for all I may appear, and any disease that exists here can only weaken me, not kill me.”

They settled down, grumbling mutinously until Uzu wrapped them all in a hug. She pulled Kisame down by his shoulders and pressed a kiss on his cheek before giving each of the younger ones a kiss on their forehead or hair. Yahiko and Nagato were sprouting up but still submitted to her affection easily.

“I will be back soon.” She promised.

Yugito held Kisame’s fingers tightly as they watched her click her way into the town, her okobo clicks echoing in the windless settlement and reassuring them slightly.

* 

Kabuto was watching. This newcomer wasn’t like the other idiots of the city. She wore expensive robes, lavishly embellished and in colours he hadn’t seen before. Her hair was a shade of red that he had seen on the poppies that grew near the cemetery.

He wondered if she had food. She didn’t look, smell or sense like the townspeople. There was none of that lingering odour of hunger and sickness that seemed to pervade the whole city. He decided to approach her. Maybe he could trick her into giving him food and she didn’t carry any weapons that he could see.

Besides the hunger gnawing at his gut was a huge motivating force.

He slipped out from his hiding place and slunk along behind the woman. She didn’t seem to have noticed him.

“Are you hungry?” He froze as she spoke. “I have some food here. I’ll put it down on the path and step away.”

She reached into her sleeve and he retreated a few steps, his eyes watching carefully, his body tense and ready to flee.

A box was opened and put down. She picked up some of its contents and stepped away to the opposite side of the street before sinking to kneel on the stones. She didn’t watch as he moved closer to the food.

He could smell rice and meat and seaweed. Onigiri. He could remember the last time he had, had onigiri. The woman he had called mother made them from the last of their leftovers. There had been an umeboshi in one of them and the surprise had made his face stretch into a happy smile. The woman he had called mother had looked almost fond. Her hand had reached out and patted his hair twice before she retreated once more, and the stink of fear returned.

Kabuto snatched up onigiri in both hands and sniffed at them. He couldn’t smell any poison. Nor was there the scent of disease from the sickness that had spread from crops and the townspeople. He watched from under his matted hair as she took a bite from the onigiri she had taken.

She stared off down the street, not watching him but he knew, she knew he was waiting to see if she died. Then again, his brain reasoned, she could have picked the one that wasn’t poisoned. But on the other hand, she had no obvious reason to want to make him sick or kill him.
The hunger in his belly turned into stabbing pains and he gave in, sinking his teeth into the sticky rice and taking a big bite. He chewed it over and over, waiting to see if a hint of poison could be found. Only rice and flakes of seaweed greeted him. He swallowed and waited again. The only pain in his belly was hunger and he took another bite. He knew better than to rush eating. He had seen it make another kid sick when they ate too much and too quickly after starving.

“I’m Uzu.” The woman said. Kabuto watched but she didn’t turn to look at him.

“Kabuto.”

“Nice to meet you Kabuto-kun.” She smiled but still didn’t look at him.

“What’re you doing here?”

“Looking for family. My family were forced to hide because their home was attacked. They hid all over the nations. So, I’ve been looking for them.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to bring them home.”

“Why?”

“Because I love them.”

Kabuto frowned. He had heard about ‘love’ before. But he didn’t know what it was. He thought maybe it was the way the baker had been having an affair with the grocer’s wife. Or the way other parents looked at their children. But what did it feel like? What is love for?

“What is love?”

She hummed and shifted so that she was sat with her knees up and her feet could rock on her okobo. She thought for a while.

“I think it depends. There’s lots of different kinds of love Kabuto-kun. There’s the love I have for my family and my children, there’s love that can be romantic, love that can be for a place or thing, love for a memory.”

Kabuto scowled. It sounded complicated and it wasn’t a logical answer. Feelings were hard to work out. Anger, fear, disgust could be used to manipulate easily if he knew the target well enough, but those other emotions were harder to decipher.

“What is the purpose of love?”

“You are a thinker, aren’t you? Clever child. I don’t think love has a purpose. It just is. It can have great and terrible consequences and effects, or it can just be a steady feeling. A mother can be driven to great lengths for love of her child. Similarly, a bereaved husband or wife can die of a broken heart.”

“The woman I called mother didn’t love me.” Kabuto said. “She was afraid of me. Everyone else was afraid too. They called me freak.”

“Ah.”

“Would my real mother have loved me?” He asked. Was it a prerequisite for all mothers to love their children?
“Your real mother was a shinobi, a medic. She was an exceptional healer. She enjoyed making other people better. She liked sweet red bean buns, paddling in streams and going on long journeys. She loved your father but when the war reached this city, she couldn’t stand the dying shinobi who would scream on the fields. So, she went out and found the injured and dying and healed them. She did this even with you in her belly.”

Kabuto listened cautiously. He had no way of knowing if this woman told the truth. But he wanted it to be true.

“She gave birth to you in the middle of the night. Named you Kabuto so you would always be strong. Then she left you with your father and went back out to heal the dying. She died on the battlefield, caught in an explosion. She saved many lives.” Uzu finished and rose to her feet, dusting her robes and hakama off.

“So, did she love me?” Kabuto asked. He stared as Uzu gathered up her box and tucked it into her sleeve.

“She loved you so much that she didn’t want you to grow up in a place where the fields were full of the dead and the ground soaked with blood. She wanted you to grow up kind and strong and full of love.”

“What is kindness?”

Uzu held out another box of food.

“Free.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Mama Uzu is gonna fix everything with onigiri. Because onigiri are awesome.

Translations:

onigiri- rice balls. Can be plain or have a filling of some sort. Usually wrapped with a strip of seaweed.
Umeboshi - 'salted Japanese plums' although the ume fruit is actually a closer relation of the apricot.

Next Chapter - Kabuto Part Two: Kabuto follows Mama Uzu because she gave him food (obviously never been given the warning not to accept food from or follow strangers). The foundlings accept Kabuto with minimal fuss, Kabuto gets a bath and the author combats gender stereotyping through the medium of hair.
Kabuto - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Kabuto Part Two: Kabuto follows Mama Uzu because she gave him food (obviously never been given the warning not to accept food from or follow strangers). The foundlings accept Kabuto with minimal fuss, Kabuto gets a bath and the author combats gender stereotyping through the medium of hair length.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! They really do motivate me.
I'm currently over ten chapters ahead of this one so fingers-crossed the updates will keep coming. Although some characters (cough Itachi cough) aren't cooperating and keep veering off into their own storylines and ignoring my plot! But I will wrangle them back!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kabuto

(Part Two)

*

When Uzu headed out of the village, Kabuto followed too. There was nothing here for him, not that there had ever been much apart from the woman he had called mother. But she was gone now and so were many of the adults. There was no one to show him ‘love’ and he thought maybe, if he followed Uzu, he might find out what ‘love’ is to him. And at the very least she had food and she might give him some more.

Uzu heard him following after her. This wild child, wearing clothes stained with sweat, dirt and other disgusting things, his hair a tangled mess akin to a bird’s nest matted to his head and big lonely eyes peering out from the muck on his skin. He was clever and could probably survive on his own if he truly wanted to, but if he wanted to follow her then she wouldn’t stop him.

“How is your hair red?” He piped up after a while. He had trotted closer to her but still remained at a wary distance.

“Because I chose to have red hair. I am not the norm. I wouldn’t use me as a baseline for humanity Kabuto-kun.” Uzu replied.

“Why are you not a normal human? Is your blood a different colour?” He frowned. She looked normal, smelt normal, spoke normally, breathed like any other human and moved like other humans.
"I was made from nature energy, patience and will. I was not born from a human mother and
father. I did not grow up from a babe to a child to an adult. I came into existence as you see me
now."

He didn’t understand but he didn’t mind. It just meant there was more to find out and he liked
finding things out.

Uzu led him out of the town, beyond the ruined fields where not even crows dared eat the failed
harvest. There was a heavy silence over the landscape and his skin felt itchy with it. Kabuto drew
closer to Uzu and walked at her side. There was something reassuring about her presence, even if
she wasn’t human or said she wasn’t human. She had been nicer to him than a lot of other humans
had ever been. Almost as nice as the woman he had called mother. But Uzu didn’t look at him the
same way as the woman he had called mother. There was no fear in her eyes, no hesitation when
she spoke to him, no careful structuring of her words to hide things from him or avoid further
questions.

Kabuto continued asking her questions as they walked and she answered them all or at the very
least responded to them even if it was just to say that she didn’t know the answer but maybe he
could find out and tell her. He liked that. It was nice to have someone interested in finding out new
things. The children in his town hadn’t asked that many questions and called him a freak when he
lay on his belly for hours watching the ants carrying food or when he sat and talked to the crows
until the crows talked back. He wondered if Uzu would think him a freak for talking to the animals
and watching them.

* 

The group waiting by the lake were weird. Kabuto watched them carefully as they all noticed Uzu
and him approaching.

"I swear you’re a magnet." The shark man said. "It’s like you can’t walk into a place without
attracting more runts."

"You’re one to talk Kisame," The blonde girl called. "Uzu-nee and I picked you up and you still
haven’t left yet even though you said you were just tagging along."

"Yugito-chan, don’t bother winding Kisame-nii up. It’s too easy. Come and help Konan and me
with these herbs." A red head boy said holding up some herbs and a wicker basket.

"Yeah, Yugito-chan. Kisame-nii loves us all too much. He’s probably squealing with joy on the
inside." The boy spoke and cackled from next to the fire they had set up. The boy sat next to him
rolled his eyes and continued reading from a scroll.

"I’ll put poison in your food you, runt." Kisame scowled and turned back to the fish he was gutting
and prepping to cook.

Kabuto’s belly rumbled.

"Yahiko, have you collected more firewood?" Uzu said and the orange-haired boy winced and
grinned sheepishly.

"I’ll go get more." He stood up and brushed his trousers off. "Utakata has some candied nuts that
he was sharing with us whilst we waited for you to get back and for Kisame to prepare the food.
The new boy sounds hungry."

Kabuto watched as Utakata reached into his sleeve and pulled out a waxed paper bag and tossed it
to Uzu. She caught it easily and opened it, ate one of the nuts and then handed it down to Kabuto at her side. The nuts were sticky and coated in a honey-flavoured glaze. Kabuto resisted the urge to grab a handful and shove them into his mouth.

“How long until you are ready to start cooking Kisame?” Uzu walked over to press a hand on the man’s shoulder. “I see you caught lots, probably a good thing as Kabuto-kun hasn’t had much to eat apart from a few rice balls.”

Kisame made a grunting noise.

“I’ve only gutted a couple. Still have a fair few to go and then I’m gonna season them. Need to prepare the veg too whilst the seasoning soaks in a bit. Say, half an hour or so before I start cooking over the fire?”

“Perfect.” Uzu ran a hand through Kisame’s upright blue hair and Kabuto saw a tooth peek out from a small smile on Kisame’s face. “I’m going to take Kabuto-kun to get cleaned up a bit. I expect you all to behave a bit longer before I get back. Konan, you’re in charge!”

Kisame protested loudly and gestured at the giggling girl who immediately began to give orders.

“Come along Kabuto-kun.” Uzu swiped up a bag and some towels. “Let’s see if we can’t get some of that dirt and grime off you. Did you know you can get unwell if you don’t bathe regularly?”

Kabuto trotted along next to her eagerly. He had tried his best to stay clean, but he wasn’t a very good swimmer and had avoided deep bodies of water. Washing up in little streams and puddles wasn’t very effective.

* 

“There you go!” Uzu announced as she rinsed the last round of shampoo from his hair. “Now we can see that silver hair shining.”

Kabuto pulled some strands round in front of his eyes. His hair had grown somewhat since the last time the woman he had called mother last cut it. He kind of liked it longer. It covered his ears and tickled his neck. Maybe it would make his head seem smaller too. The children in town had sometimes said that he had a fat head because his brain was too big and that was why he was a freak.

“Are you going to cut it?” He asked Uzu and peered up at her from his seat on her lap.

She had decided it would be best if he sat on her lap when he had eyed the lake nervously. It wasn’t a particularly deep lake but bending over from the bank would have been exhausting for both of them.

She shrugged in answer to his question.

“It’s up to you. I cut Yahiko’s hair and Kisame’s because their hair grows upwards and they prefer it shorter. Nagato, Utakata and Konan like a little bit of length to theirs and Yugito-chan is growing her hair out. My hair, as you have seen, is very long. If you want to have long hair then you can, if you want short hair you can and if you want no hair at all we can shave it off.”

Kabuto frowned. “I do not wish to be bald.”

“Hair it is.”
“But I do not know whether I will like it long or short.” He paused. “The woman that I called mother always used to cut it shorter than Yahiko’s. I do not like it that short.”

Uzu hummed.

“Well, we could leave it alone for a bit. Let it grow out a bit more and you can try different styles and see what you like best?”

He nodded. “That seems like a suitable approach.”

“Glad you approve. Now, finish up washing off.” Uzu handed him a soapy flannel and stood him up so he was standing on her legs.

He rubbed himself all over, handing the flannel to Uzu and turning so she could wash his back and the hard to reach places. She was soft as she rubbed the soapy cloth over the grime, working it into his skin. One hand remained in his the whole time, and he automatically tightened his grip whenever he felt unbalanced. At no point, however, did he think that she would let him fall into the water.

“Rinse off whilst I wash up.” Uzu said and he sank back down onto her lap. The water rose up to his chest and the soap billowed on the surface. He used his hands to splash the refreshing water over his exposed shoulders chest.

Behind him Uzu cleansed herself, keeping Kabuto balanced on one leg, then the other as she washed. Her hair had been piled up on her head out of the water and Kabuto absent-mindedly wondered how long it would take to wash and dry all that hair. He didn’t think he wanted his hair to be that long.

“All done?” She asked.

He nodded and let her lift him out onto the riverbank. She pulled herself out after him and wrapped a towel around her torso after enveloping him in one. He wiped himself dry and marvelled at the wonderful sensation of cleanliness that overtook him.

“Here are some clothes you can wear Kabuto-kun. We might have to roll the sleeves and legs up a bit. I don’t have much clothing for a child your size.”

Kabuto didn’t particularly care about clothing, as long as he could move in it and it didn’t get in the way of observation it was fine. The trousers and happi coat Uzu gave him were more than sufficient however. They fit almost perfectly with only a bit too much in the legs and sleeves as Uzu had guessed there would be.

He actually found himself inspecting his reflection in the lake as he leaned over carefully. The happi coat was blue, patterned with white and paler blue waves and the trousers were a deep purple, almost black. She handed him a pair of children’s zori and tabi and he pulled them both on. Having something on his feet for the first time in a while was an unusual sensation. His sandals had fallen apart a few weeks ago and he had taken to using scraps of cloth for shoes when he absolutely needed them.

Uzu finished dressing herself whilst he inspected his reflection.

“Satisfied Kabuto-kun?” She asked.

He turned around and nodded trotting over to her side. His stomach growled again, and he wrinkled his nose. Uzu had been carefully feeding him small portions since they met, and it seemed it was
time for another small portion of food.

“Shall we see if Kisame is cooking yet?” She gestured towards the camp and Kabuto looked up at her.

“What are you going to ask for in repayment for the food and clothing?” He questioned.

“Nothing. They are freely given.” She replied. “You owe me and my children nothing.”

“Do you always have food?”

“Yes.”

Kabuto considered his options for a while.

“Would I have to pay for food if I wanted to stay with you?”

“No. Family doesn’t need to pay for food.”


* 

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kabuto & Yahiko: Kabuto grows closer to the other foundlings. Yahiko is his favourite and the Ame orphan brings him a present. Uzu displays her animal knowledge. There are implications of animal therapy.
Kabuto & Yahiko

Chapter Summary

Kabuto & Yahiko: Kabuto grows closer to the other foundlings. Yahiko is his favourite and the Ame orphan brings him a present. Uzu displays her animal knowledge. There are implications of animal therapy.

Chapter Notes

I know I say this (literally) every day, but thank you all for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! They really do make me smile. In honour of reaching a 150 kudos I am giving you not one but two chapters today! So make sure you read Kabuto & Yahiko before reading Tsunade Part One!

Shout out to dreamlessknight, MzGreenJeans73 and pink_potato who have commented on every (or nearly every) chapter! Much love to you all!

Now, I present Kabuto & Yahiko

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kabuto & Yahiko

*

Uzu’s family confused Kabuto. They seemed as if they didn’t get along, but no one ever shouted properly at each other. They had arguments but Uzu always stepped in and mediated and any disagreements were swiftly resolved, forgiven and forgotten.

In Kabuto’s experience disagreements usually festered and grew. The woman that he had called mother was an example. She had never been happy raising him, he had heard her complain once to his father before he died, that she wanted her own proper child. His father had said that it wasn’t the time and that they would wait until after the war. That disagreement had made it unpleasant at the dinner table and Kabuto often ate quickly so he could go to his room and investigate whatever animal he had managed to sneak into the house.

The woman that he had called mother also had many disagreements about the aforementioned animals being brought into the house. Kabuto never did anything to them (although he was curious about how their insides worked) but kept them in boxes, jars and the rabbit cage he had found in a pile of rubbish and observed them. The woman that he had called mother disapproved of his collection of snakes, mice, beetles, bugs and other vermin.

She had made him take the baby rabbit he had found abandoned back out to the forest, claiming that it was disease ridden. The baby rabbit didn’t survive the night and Kabuto had come back to find it half devoured by foxes. He thought the rabbit would have survived in his room but also found the tiny bones that had been left behind fascinating.
Eventually, the woman that he had called mother made him get rid of all his animals. She said it was because she wasn’t wasting food on them, but by that point Kabuto had come to the same conclusion and released them willingly. He didn’t want the animals to starve. Or at least, not starve by his hand.

Uzu’s family was different though. When he had found a lizard and stopped to watch it, no one hurried him away or moaned about it. Uzu had crouched down next to him and they both watched the reptile blinking lazily and its tongue flicking out into the air.

They had watched and then, once the lizard went on its way they too carried on their way.

When Kisame prepared their dinner, gutting, skinning and de-boning whenever necessary, he let Kabuto watch.

The first time he had commented,

“You’re a curious little runt, aren’t you?” but made no other indication of disapproval or irritation.

Yahiko was Kabuto’s favourite of Uzu’s children however. The boy was vastly different from him in character, age, temperament and interests but he would carry Kabuto on his back when the smaller boy was tired and ask and answer lots of questions. Kabuto learnt to take things he said with a certain degree of suspicion as Yahiko liked to make mischief but for the most part he answered truthfully.

* 

Yahiko was the first person (outside his father, the woman that he had called mother and Uzu) to ever give him something without wanting something back. Kabuto had been polishing off a biscuit and a cup of milk Uzu had bought from the farmer whose land they were walking through, when Yahiko came racing from the farmyard with something hidden behind his back.

Uzu had watched with a soft smile so Kabuto wasn’t too worried.

“Hey, Kabuto!” Yahiko called and skidded to a halt in front of him. The boy bounced on his toes and kept his hands behind his back. “I got you something. Finish that biscuit off!”

Kabuto didn’t hurry and chewed the last of the sweet treat, carefully savouring every morsel before washing it down with the last of his milk. The second he had placed the cup down Yahiko was calling for him to hold his hands out and close his eyes.

After a quick glare at Yahiko (who was totally unphased and continued to grin) he held his hands out and indeed closed his eyes.

“I’m gonna put it in your hands now, don’t squeeze or drop it.” Yahiko said solemnly, an abrupt change from his earlier boisterous shouting.

There was an increase in pressure in his hands, and Kabuto felt rough skin and a hard surface land in his cupped hands. Yahiko’s hands went to the outside of his to support him and Kabuto frowned as he tried to work out what Yahiko had given him.

“Okay, open your eyes!” Yahiko was barely containing his excitement.

Kabuto opened his eyes and stared down at his hands in wonder. There was a tortoise, a fairly small one, cradled in his hands. He had never seen one before, only in the magazines and a few pictures in the bookshop. The tortoise was partially retreated into its shell but as Yahiko and
Kabuto watched in silence as it unfurled its legs and head, poking out from the patterned shell.

“Cool huh?” Yahiko murmured and peered up at Kabuto from his position kneeling in front of the boy sat on the grassy bank. “It belonged to the farmer’s son, was a present from an uncle who has too much money and little sense. The son doesn’t want it anymore and they were giving it away, although they did say that if you don’t want it, they might try to eat it.”

Kabuto wrinkled his nose. Why would anyone want to eat such a creature? It wouldn’t be the same as livestock, fish or rabbit. Then his mind registered what Yahiko said properly.

“If I don’t want it?” He whispered and looked at Yahiko with wide eyes. “I can have it?”

Yahiko chuckled and winked. “I already asked Uzu-kaa-chan. She said it’ll be our responsibility to look after it, feed it and keep it warm but she doesn’t mind. She even said we can get a basket in the next town or make a crate or something to carry it in while we walk.”

“I won’t have to put it back in the wild? It’s for me and you?” Kabuto couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

Yahiko’s brow furrowed and his nose wrinkled slightly.

“Yeah, only if you want though. And I don’t think it would last very long in the wild. This nation is too cold for it.”

“I do. I want it. I want it. I want it.” Kabuto cradled the tortoise gently to his chest, his hands quivering.

“Yes! Now you just need to name it. I don’t know how we can tell if it is a girl or a boy… Uzu-kaa-chan!” He called out to the woman and she bowed to the farmer who had been watching with her before gliding over.

Kabuto was always surprised how Uzu would sink so quickly and almost nonchalantly onto the ground, regardless of the surface beneath her and the damage it could do to her robes. If any of the children needed her, she would stop and be at their side, standing, kneeling or picking them up if necessary.

“Kabuto-kun wants to keep the tortoise and I said that you said we could.” Yahiko began.

Uzu looked at Kabuto.

“I did say you could keep it. But it’ll be your responsibility. You and Yahiko are both going to be the tortoise’s owners.”

Kabuto nodded fiercely.

“We can do it. We can look after it.”

“I’m sure you can.” Uzu smiled gently and reached out to pat Kabuto’s hair gently.

“Uzu-kaa-chan, how do we tell if it’s a boy or a girl? We need to give it a proper name.” Yahiko questioned. “Do we have to check if it has a penis?”

Konan who had been sat nearby wrinkled her nose and then blushed as Yugito asked why girls didn’t have a penis. Kisame roared with laughter as Nagato and Utakata also turned an interesting shade.
Uzu shook her head exasperatedly and fondly before turning back to Yahiko and Kabuto who were eagerly awaiting her answer.

“You won’t be able to see if it has a penis. This tortoise isn’t fully mature yet, it’s still quite young. The best indicators are the tail and the notch at the back of the shell.” Uzu carefully lifted the tortoise from Kabuto and turned it over.

The tortoise retreated back into its shell and they could see its eyes peering at them with almost hostile energy. She pointed to the tail (which appeared quite stumpy) and the notch which was a ‘u’ like shape.

“These could indicate that this is a female tortoise. But it isn’t completely accurate.” Uzu explained and handed their tortoise back to Kabuto.

“So, we can’t tell?” Yahiko pouted slightly. “Couldn’t you ask it, like you speak to the animals on Uzushio?”

Uzu shook her head.

“Animals born on Uzushio are connected to me. If this tortoise had been born we would be able to speak to it. I’m afraid you’re just going to have to pick a name. Besides, does it really matter if it turns out to be the opposite gender?” Uzu questioned. “What’s important is that you give it a name and care for it, not whether it has a boy’s name or a girl’s name. Besides, names can be for anyone.”

Yahiko and Kabuto looked at each before shrugging. They guessed Uzu was right. It didn’t really matter if their tortoise was a boy or a girl or if it had a girl or boys name.

*

It took them three days to decide on a name for their new tortoise. Everyone had given suggestions, some which Kabuto and Yahiko had promptly dismissed (like Kisame’s suggestions of: Dinner, Breakfast, Snack, Ball) and others which they had considered (Lettuce, Tomato and Leaf).

Finally, they decided that their tortoise would become a warrior tortoise (because an ordinary tortoise was cool but a warrior one was even cooler) and so the tortoise was named Genbu-chan. They figured that Genbu was a boy and girl name and if it turned out Genbu-chan was a boy then they could just change it to Genbu-kun later.

Kabuto found that with the addition of Genbu-chan he felt more settled into Uzu’s family. It was as if being given a pet had solidified his bond with them all and as they all made their way across the nations, following Uzu, Kabuto decided that he could forgive and admire the woman he had called mother for being afraid of him but caring for him anyway.

He felt accepted by the other children, who all called him Kabuto-kun, and he began to refer to them as his older siblings. He even, after a long conversation with Genbu-chan (who was an exceptionally good listener), decided that he too wanted to call Uzu, Okaa-san.

The smile and kiss on the forehead Uzu gave him when he first called her Okaa-san, made his heart race slightly. He still didn’t understand what everything was, he still had loads of questions and he still wanted to find out more things, but he knew that he had a family and an Okaa-san.

For now, Kabuto was content.

*
Chapter End Notes

I had to do actual research for this chapter. I thought tortoises were hard to sex and turns out it's true! And what else did we learn from this chapter? Answer: Kisame doesn't get to name things.

Next Chapter: Tsunade Part One

I am literally posting it right after this so go ahead and read it! Don't wait for the chapter synopsis! Go!
Tsunade - Part One

Chapter Summary

Uzu and Tsunade don't get on at their first or second meeting. Tsunade's bad luck is rampant and she can't even have a bath in peace.

Chapter Notes

I posted two chapters tonight! So if you haven't read Kabuto & Yahiko go back and read that first?

Done? You may continue with Tsunade... Who I had to get tipsy to write... She's a tricky lady.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tsunade

(Part One)

*

When Uzu met Tsunade, it didn’t go well.

Eight months after Kabuto joined their tribe and they followed their usual program of wandering, shamisen playing, earning money and generally existing. A visit to the Land of Tea had included a visit to a newly married Hotaru and Kenji. They celebrated their happiness gladly before moving on once more.

Throughout the nations they had traversed they experienced a little trouble with bandits who thought a woman, a man (although Kisame was still just a teenager even if a growth spurt had landed him near six foot in height) and six children would be an easy target.

Kisame, the Ame trio and Yugito delighted in proving such thugs wrong and collecting the rewards for their capture. Kabuto had taken an interest in medical jutsu (just as Uzu suspected he would being descended from a Hou-o mother) but had also begun training with Kisame to build up stamina and defensive abilities. Utakata continued his own training, as a Jinchūriki he knew that he would be pursued and could face threats if someone found out about Saiken, but did not enjoy fighting the same way Yugito did.

When they were in the wilds, where human settlements were few and far between, Matatabi and Saiken would materialise. Matatabi enjoyed pacing along beside Yugito as a house cat sized companion or giving the younger children a ride as a tiger-sized version. Saiken enjoyed riding on Utakata’s shoulder or with Genbu-chan in her wicker basket which Kabuto or Yahiko most often carried on their backs. The slug also enjoyed being used as a slide at lakes and eagerly joined in any fun.
These happy travels were interrupted, quite rudely, by Uzu meeting the Slug Princess.

*

Tsunade staggered out of the bar, a pout on her face and a trickle of sweat making its way down her face. She had lost, again. And now she owed every gambling den in the Land of Honey. Every, single, one.

Shizune scrambled after her with the piglet she had adopted clutched in her arms.

“Lady Tsunade!” Shizune stuck close to her side as the less then happy proprietors of the bar/gambling den slunk out after them.

“Maa. I just wanna drink some more.” Tsunade looked up at the night sky.

It was so hot here. Summer was in full swing and she had long since abandoned her green coat. Come to think of it she couldn’t remember exactly where she had left it. Was it back in the first bar? Or the third one? Or was it in that super shady gambling den that they went to before this one?

A full moon gleamed above them and she sighed heavily. Didn’t really matter. It was just a coat.

“So, you going to pay for all the booze?” One of the proprietors swaggered over. His eyes were fixed firmly on Tsunade’s breasts and she smirked. The girls were always usefull, although there had been that one gambling den run entirely by gay men… She had gotten some good makeup tips there if she remembered correctly.

“Don’t worry about it!” She drawled. “We- we- can drink som’ more! Just put-it-onna-tab!”

“Lady Tsunade, you’ve already drunk all the alcohol they have.” Shizune whispered, eying the encroaching men with knives and other weapons appearing from their pockets. “This is the most expensive bar in the Land of Honey. You drank them dry!”

“Huh? I did?! Mustn’t’ve been vrry good then. Oth-othe-wise, else I would’na drunk sooo much!” Tsunade reasoned (quite logically in her mind).

The hard done by bar/gambling den owners all seemed to growl in unison. Tsunade wondered if they practiced that, because surely it wasn’t normal for people to growl simultaneously. Maybe they had growling sessions and practiced the perfect growl for the perfect occasion.

She was brought back to her current situation as a knife flicked past her face, trimming a piece of her fringe off.

“Hey, you cut a woman’s hair! Issa not a good thing! Bad man!” She frowned. “A woman’s hair is, is, is… Shizune wassa word I want?”

“Sacred?”

Tsunade pulled Shizune in under her arm, pressing the girl (and piglet) close.

“Thas it! Sacred! You’re such a clever girl Shizune.”

The proprietors all launched forward but were brought to an abrupt halt as a blur of silk landed in their midst.

Tsunade reeled back at the newcomer’s close arrival and her eyes widened as the woman straightened from her crouch. A kitsune mask was tied tightly onto her head, hair that looked like
blood in the moonlight braided and twisted back behind her and long robes fluttering in echoes of her movements.

Real blood dripped from the woman’s fingers onto the ground and Tsunade’s gaze fixed upon them. Tremors wracked her body and the sweat from the heat was suddenly cold and panicked. She pressed her hands to her stomach and backed away.

The masked newcomer tilted her head to one side, regarding Tsunade who was partially doubled over, shaking and being comforted by Shizune.

“Hmm. You aren’t what I expected from Mito’s granddaughter.” The voice from behind the mask assessed. “Still, it’s my bad.”

Her non-bleeding hand rose to cover Tsunade’s eyes. A scent of salt, cherry blossoms and soil filled Tsunade’s nose, erasing the acrid iron stench of blood. Long, elegant fingers hid the blood from all sight.

“This wasn’t how I had hoped we would meet and I’m afraid introductions will have to wait for another time Tsunade-chan.” The woman spoke. “I suggest you depart. Judging by the fragrant stench of alcohol billowing from you, you’ve drunk enough to make even a Bijuu tipsy.”

A vicious snarl tore from Tsunade’s lips.

“Don’t you dare judge me. You have no right!”

The woman’s voice remained gentle.

“Hmm, I suppose I don’t. But it is sad that you are so desperate to drown your sorrows that you drive yourself to the edge of oblivion over and over.”

The hand lifted from Tsunade’s eyes and cupped her chin instead, keeping her from looking downward and towards the blood.

“Take in the stars Tsunade-chan. How long has it been since you looked at them?” The woman said. Then her hand was gone.

A gentle breeze buffeted Tsunade and Shizune at the woman’s departure and they heard a mischievous laugh. Guards from the Lord’s fortress were charging through the street after the masked woman and she was cackling.

Shizune pulled Tsunade to the side of the street, back into the cover of an alleyway.

In all the ruckus the bar owners had forgotten about the debtor and were transfixed as the masked woman ran circles around the guards.

“Shizune. Time to go.” Tsunade pushed healing chakra through her body, burning off some of the alcohol in her system. Just enough to make a clean escape.

“Yes, Lady Tsunade.” Shizune nodded and followed behind, loyal as ever.

*  

Two towns over Tsunade and Shizune finally came to a stop. They had run for over an hour and left the Lord’s town behind with all Tsunade’s gambling and drinking debts unpaid. The alcohol had started to burn off but Tsunade didn’t really feel up to finding another bar that might still be
open in the early hours of the morning.

An inn seemed like a good idea and as luck would have it there was one with a free room. Shizune tucked her piglet into her kimono and giggled as Tonton squeaked happily.

“Shall I see if we can use the baths Lady Tsunade? It might be nice to go to bed fresh after all our - uh- exercise.”

Tsunade flapped her hand and the teenager smiled happily. Tsunade leaned against the wall and watched as her student trotted over to the front desk and began making inquiries. A fond smile formed on Tsunade’s face. She really didn’t know what she would do without Shizune. If anything was keeping her grounded at all, it was the niece of her lover, the last remnant of him beside her memories.

But even her memories were tainted now. Stained with that final moment. As if the blood on her hands had seeped into the memories of happier times and tinted them all a shade of crimson.

Before she could get too maudlin, Shizune came scampering back and chattering about the baths still being open.

Tsunade followed behind, eager to wipe off the sweat that had oozed from her body during her terror. There were several cubby holes in the women’s changing room that were occupied with clothing. Three in fact.

As she disrobed and moved to the wash area, Tsunade noticed that there was a familiar scent lingering in the air. Cherry blossoms. She shrugged her shoulders. It was probably just the scent of someone’s soap.

Steam was floating heavily in the bathroom and Tsunade wasted no time washing, eager to get in a soak before bed. There was also soft murmuring from the bath itself, but the occupants were being pretty quiet.

She let out a soft sigh as she sank into the water feeling the remaining stress from her earlier panic attack ebbing away. Shizune was washing Tonton off and Tsunade leaned back against the side of the bath and kept an eye on the young girl.

It had been nearly two years since the end of the war. Two years since Dan, two years since she had left the village that her family had built behind her. She would like to say she missed it, but it had taken so much from her. The legacy of her grandfather was all that remained now, the Will of Fire.

Tsunade’s Will of Fire had petered out. Extinguished when she lost comrade after comrade, patient after patient and those closest to her. Nawaki. Dan.

Another heavy sigh fell unbidden from her mouth and she turned her attention to the bath water.

A pair of blue eyes and a pair of gold were peering at her from just above the water’s surface. Tsunade resisted the urge to flinch at their sudden appearance. Damp hair was plastered to the girls’ scalps.

“Can I help you little girls?” Tsunade raised an eyebrow.

“Nope. We’re just curious. How did you get your breasts to grow that big? Uzu-nee’s aren’t half as big as yours.” The little blonde said frankly.
Tsunade felt a fake smile forming.

“I didn’t do anything. They’re all natural. Now.” She smiled even sweeter, but the girls seemed unphased. “Why don’t you go back to your Uzu-nee and let me bathe in peace.”

“Yugito, Konan. Leave Tsunade-chan alone.” An all too familiar voice rang out.

Tsunade surged to her feet and pointed at the woman who was leaning against the side of the bath and yawning as she spoke.

“You!” Tsunade bellowed. “What in hell’s name are you doing here?”

The red head’s brow furrowed disapprovingly.

“Mind your language please Tsunade-chan. There are children present.”

Tsunade spluttered and made to move towards the woman. She wasn’t entirely sure why she was so infuriated. Maybe it was the fact that the woman had bled in front of her and questioned her drinking habit or the fact that she had the gall to call her Tsunade-chan or the motherly like scolding reprimanding her for using a mild curse word.

Unfortunately, Tsunade never reached the woman as her foot slipped on something beneath the bath’s surface and she went tumbling backwards. Her arms pinwheeled in the air but there was nothing to grab on the way down and her head hit the bath edge with a thud.

She felt someone pull her out of the water and hold her head against their chest.

“Well, this definitely isn’t how I intended to introduce myself. Seems you really are unlucky Tsunade-chan.”

As she drifted off Tsunade couldn’t help but agree. Unlucky Tsunade. Maybe that should be her new name.

*

Chapter End Notes

I have no idea if the Land of Honey is a real place. I just wanted to write somewhere other than the nations we know/now of. Besides, bees are amazing, honey tastes fantastic and honey mead is also great...

Next Chapter - Tsunade Part Two:

Tsunade may or may not have a concussion. Tsundere Kisame makes an appearance. And that old saying 'from the mouths of babes comes truth'... well it might be true.
Tsunade - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Tsunade may or may not have a concussion. Tsundere Kisame makes an appearance. And that old saying 'from the mouths of babes comes truth'... well it might be true.

Chapter Notes

A shorter chapter this time. I write up to my 2000 word limit but sometimes chapters just have a natural shorter length. This is one of them.

Thank you for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tsunade

(Part Two)

*

“Will Tsunade-oba-chan be alright?” A young voice piped out near Tsunade’s throbbing skull.

She winced at the high-pitched voice. Her head didn’t normally hurt this much from drinking. And why was there a cold compress on it too? Was she sick?

“Lady Tsunade will be fully recovered in a few seconds. It was quite an unexpected blow. I just need to…” Shizune’s voice trailed off and Tsunade felt the familiar warmth of her pupil’s healing chakra focus on the pressure in her skull.

Her eyes blinked open, focussing slowly on her student’s face that was etched with relief.

“Shizune…”

“You’re alright Lady Tsunade.” Shizune soothed and withdrew her chakra. “You had a bit of a slip in the bath. Uzu-sama helped me get you out and dressed and then Kisame-san carried you up to our room.”

Tsunade rolled her head to take in the group sitting over near the open window. The night was still humid and hot but there was a slight breeze flowing in. Shizune plucked the cold cloth off her forehead and dipped it into a bowl of water. She wrung it out and then mopped Tsunade’s face with it. It was wonderfully refreshing and Tsunade felt some of the last groginess from her concussion easing away.

The two girls from the bath were there, accompanied by three other boys of similar ages. They were all huddled together, leaning on each other sleepily. Shizune glanced warily at the man who was furthest away from the group, propped up in the corner with a bandaged blade resting over his
lap. He grinned cheekily and Tsunade couldn’t help but notice the sharp teeth.

Then there was the woman, Uzu-sama, Uzu-nee-chan or whatever she was called. She was sat closest to the window, between the group of sleepy children and the man in the corner. A young boy was cradled against her torso. His eyes were shut, and his chest rose and fell slowly as he slumbered. He was completely content where he was and Tsunade smiled. She remembered sleeping like that against her own mother, and against Mito-obaa-chan.

“Seems we shall have to see if you are unlucky in our third meeting Tsunade-chan.” Uzu said softly.

Tsunade rolled her eyes.

“You have too many brats. Are they all yours?”

Uzu pressed a soft kiss to the hair of the boy in her lap. He murmured and twisted so he was buried deeper against her.

“They are.”

Tsunade glanced over the children again. There weren’t any common family features. The blue-haired girl had similar bone structure to Uzu, the hair of one of the boys was a lighter shade than Uzu’s but that was where the similarities ended.

“Adopted huh?” Tsunade pushed herself up into a seated position on the futon. Her head pulsed slightly but she ignored it to focus on the mocking laugh from the man in the corner. “What’s so funny?”

“You have no idea who she is, do you?” The man sniggered. “Uzu, why doesn’t this old bat know who you are?”

“Old bat?!”

Uzu looked at the man and he winced.

“Sorry Uzu-nee.” He apologised.

“She is further distanced from me than the rest of them are. You are the unusual one Kisame.” Uzu explained.

“Keh. She still should be able to sense something from you. Even I could. I don’t want her disrespecting you.” He grumbled but softened when Uzu smiled at him.

Tsunade clenched her hand into a fist. Her nails dug into the soft pads of her palm. Just who exactly was this audacious woman.

“We shall leave you Tsunade-chan, Shizune-chan, Tonton.” Uzu announced and nudged at the almost slumbering pile of children.

They groaned and dragged themselves up from their pile and filed out of the room, holding onto each other via hands, sleeves and even hair. Unwilling to let go of each other and awaken fully. Kisame lifted his blade and surged to his feet, swinging the blade to rest against a shoulder and then holding out a hand to Uzu.

The woman accepted it and he lifted her and the boy easily. The move was so smooth that it could
not have been anything but a frequent occurrence. Uzu, once steady on her feet, reached up and patted Kisame’s shoulder.

“If you want to ask questions then we will be here in the morning, but we plan to set off early.” Uzu offered. “We are travelling back home.”

Curiosity gnawed at Tsunade. Who was this woman with such an assortment of children? And where could their home be?

“Where’s home? What nation are you from?” She blurted out, unable to stifle her questions. Something was tickling at the back of her mind. Uzu felt familiar. More familiar than she should be from two very short meetings.

A faint remnant of a memory of red sands, blue ocean waters and a village with red tiled roofs flickered in her mind.

“Home is Uzushio.” Uzu said sweetly.

Tsunade gasped and watched as Uzu bowed to her and Shizune, still cradling her youngest child before leaving too. Kisame slid the door shut and Tsunade heard him murmur to Uzu.

“Was that the best course of action?”

“I don’t know.” Uzu laughed. “I’m just making this all up as I go along. You know there’s no big plan Kisame.”

“Keh, you want to know what I know?” He said, their voices fading as they moved down the hallway.

“Of course.”

“I know you’re going to end up with a sad, lonely, heartbroken lady and her student and their pet pig. You just can’t help it. You attract broken things.”

Tsunade stared at her fists clenched in her lap. Was she broken? Was it that obvious that she was cracked? That she had gathered up the pieces of her heart and soul and was cupping them so tenderly, trying to hold onto what she had left?

She knew when she had shattered. But now she wasn’t sure how to stick the pieces back together. And if she did… well… there would be big shards missing. And a broken thing with lost pieces wasn’t worth much really.

*

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
oba-chan - Auntie
obaa-chan - Granny
Next Chapter - Tsunade Part Three: Tsunade suffers from insomnia. Uzu also appears to be having trouble sleeping. Konan is a sweetheart who suckers Tsunade into playing hanafuda.
**Tsunade - Part Three**

Chapter Summary

Tsunade - Part Three:
Tsunade suffers from insomnia. Uzu also appears to be having trouble sleeping. Konan is a sweetheart who suckers Tsunade into playing hanafuda.

Chapter Notes

I'm a teeny bit late. In my defence, I had a glass of wine or two and forgot to post before midnight GMT time. But it's probably still Saturday somewhere in the world so have a chapter.

Thanks as always for every subscription, bookmark, kudos and comment! We're nearly at 100 bookmarks and 100 subscriptions and 200 Kudos is fast approaching! And we've gone over 3000 hits in less than a month which is a new record for me. Much love to you all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tsunade

(Part Three)

*

Night continued on. Tsunade didn’t sleep. Next to her Shizune’s soft breaths were steady and even and the whistling snuffles from Tonton made a counter motif. Tsunade lay on her back, one arm thrown over her eyes to block out the world.

The words she had heard early running around and around in her head, a constant repetition. They prevented her from sleeping. Sad, lonely, heartbroken, broken. Sad, lonely, heartbroken, broken, sad, lonely, heartbroken, broken, sadlonelyheartbrokenbroken.

She flung the covers off and surged to her feet. There was something twisting at her insides, a throbbing sensation that mangled her breaths and tormented her heart rate.

She dressed quickly, throwing her clothing on as silently as possible. Slipped out the door and down to the front of the inn. A bench had been placed out front, a place for weary travellers to sit for a while or for renewed ones to gather themselves before continuing on their journey.

It was already partially occupied and Tsunade groaned.

“Why the hell are you everywhere I go?” She snarled and plonked herself on the bench as far away from Uzu.

The woman was plucking gently at a shamisen, tuning it effortlessly. Tsunade watched her from
the corner of her eye. She began to play staring off into nothing and not even acknowledging
Tsunade’s presence.

A young girl came out from the inn, one of Uzu’s children. She brought a tray with teacups with
her and poured out a cup for all three of them before settling down on the ground and leaning
against Uzu’s legs.

She listened quietly as Uzu played and watched the dawn fall. Tsunade sipped gratefully at the tea.
It seemed to chase away some of the darker thoughts in her mind, even if only for a moment.

When Uzu finished playing she placed her shamisen down next to her and picked up her teacup.

“Thank you Konan-chan. Unable to sleep?”

Konan wrinkled her nose and Tsunade could see slight smudges under her eyes.

“Bad dreams Uzu-kaa-chan. Memories.”

“Mmm.” Uzu made a noise of acknowledgement, sipping at her tea. Konan seemed to relax further
against the woman’s legs. Tsunade envied the young girl her ease and the comfort she took from
the woman.

“What kept you awake Tsunade-chan?” Uzu finally mentioned her presence.

“Memories, thoughts.”

“I hope Kisame’s words didn’t upset you. He can be a bit – gruff at times but he means well.”

Tsunade snorted. The man definitely wasn’t subtle.

Konan turned around and pulled a deck of cards from her sleeve.

“Can we play Uzu-kaa-chan?”

Tsunade looked at the cards that the girl was laying down on the bench. Hanafuda, huh? It had
been a long time since she had played. In fact, the last person she could remember teaching how to
play was Nawaki. He had never had the patience to sit still for a long time.

The corner of her mouth lifted up in a weak smile. It had been a while since she remembered
Nawaki smiling. It felt like all the memories she had been recalling over the last few years were
those of him being covered by a sheet. A shiver ran down her spine.

There was a tug on her sleeve and she jerked her hand up to instinctively swat at her attacker but
was stopped by a block from Uzu’s arm. She reared back, horrified that she had almost swatted
Konan away. Uzu said nothing but sipped her tea and continued to stare at the rising sunlight
staining the sky.

“Do you know how to play Tsunade-ba-chan?” Konan asked sweetly. The girl had laid the field out
and was holding out cards to Tsunade, her own hand already dealt.

“Um, it’s been a few years since I played.” Tsunade said, embarrassment still coursing through her.

“That’s alright. I’ve only just started learning. Uzu-kaa-chan is teaching us all.” Konan pushed the
cards into Tsunade’s hand. “Koi-Koi?”

Tsunade nodded and they began the game. Konan was hesitant with some of the cards – she really
only had just begun to learn to play and checked in with Uzu for pairings and to see if she had reached a yaku. Uzu leaned over to consider her cards and hand, murmuring softly and advising the girl who beamed at her every single time.

Nawaki had smiled at her like that once. As if her attention was worth everything.

Tsunade lost the first hand, deliberately (giving Konan a confidence boost), and as they continued playing Uzu seemed to focus more, as if she hadn’t been entirely present this whole time. Her attention had been divided between her shamisen, Konan and something in her mind.

Under Uzu’s full attention and watchful eyes Tsunade swallowed. This woman felt familiar. But it was a long ago memory, one that Tsunade couldn’t quite grasp. As if it were so old it had gone hazy and wispy over time. A faded echo of remembrance and familiarity that teased at the back of her mind. She knew she had met Uzu before but when?

The woman didn’t look physically that old. Tsunade would say that she was younger than her (after all she kept her age concealed via a handy jutsu) but at least ten years older than Shizune. But she had the audacity to call one of The Legendary Sannin ‘chan’ but not in a mocking or insulting way. Rather as if she were so much older that ‘chan’ was simply her being affectionate to a younger child.

Then there was the hair. Uzumaki red. Darker than Mito-obaa-chan’s and Kushina’s. Darker than most Uzumaki she could recall meeting. But she knew the Uzumaki were long lived, Mito-obaa-chan had lived well beyond Hashirama-ojii-chan and Tobirama-oji-chan and was older than Sarutobi-sensei who had already been old when he took the Sannin as his pupils.

Uzu had mentioned Mito-obaa-chan by name. As if she knew her, but then… Well, then Uzu would have to be as old as Tsunade or even older. Maybe she was using a jutsu to conceal her age too? But there wasn’t the constant chakra usage that would indicate such a jutsu. A seal maybe?

“So Tsunade-chan, has your clever mind worked it out yet?” Uzu was watching their game. Tsunade glanced up from her cards and narrowed her eyes.

“How old I am? Who I am? Why I call you Tsunade-chan?”

“I think you’re not who you appear to be. Uzumaki hair, bone structure like Konan’s, multiple children who could all feasibly be yours except they don’t have many family features to link them to you. If you are an Uzumaki and you knew Mito-obaa-chan then you have to be my age at least.”

“We’re adopted!” Konan piped up and then grinned as she got a yaku and called koi-koi. “Uzu-kaa-chan looked for us and asked us if we wanted to come with her. We all did. Apart from Kisame-nii who Yugito-chan says they fed and couldn’t get rid of.”

“Kisame is one of your kids too?” Tsunade was shocked. “How old is the blue man?”

Uzu leaned over and whispered into Konan’s ear. The girl snickered and Tsunade scowled. It seemed Uzu was using their conversation to try and divert attention from the card game. Not that it made much difference. The Legendary Sucker usually lost at most games. Even when there wasn’t money on the line.

“Kisame turned sixteen a couple of months ago.” Uzu eventually replied.

“Huh. I would’ve thought he was much older than that.” Tsunade mused and held back a shout of
glee as she got a yaku. Konan pouted (and Tsunade didn’t find it adorable at all).

“You should know as well as any shinobi that appearances can be deceiving.” The other woman seemed to lecture. “You are not as young as you appear to be Tsunade-chan.”

“Well neither are you! Not if you were alive when Mito-obaa-chan was.” Tsunade protested. “I’d remember if another Uzumaki showed up to visit. Kushina and her family are the only Uzumaki who’ve been to Konoha. We thought the rest died in the Fall of Uzushiogakure.”

She winced as Uzu’s body stiffened. That had been a bit tactless. Bringing up the fall of an entire village in front of a potential survivor.

“I never claimed to be an Uzumaki.”

“But you have the hair. And if you are as old as you claim to be then that further indicates the Uzumaki longevity. Your name even sounds like an Uzumaki.”

Uzu tilted her head and the aforementioned crimson hair draped down her side to pool on her robes. There was a pensive expression on her face and Tsunade fought back the urge to look away, to break her gaze with the ocean blue eyes that seemed to be calculating Tsunade’s potential response and reading her soul and inner most thoughts.

“Uzumaki… Their name came from the whirlpools. The whirlpools of Uzushio. Who’s to say my name didn’t come from Uzushio?”

Konan giggled.

“Uzu-kaa-chan, you’re being mean to Tsunade-oba-chan.”

Uzu lunged and grabbed the girl around the waist, pulling the teenager into her lap and nuzzling her cheek. The girl seemed to delight in their play and shrieked loudly, half-heartedly making an attempt to free herself.

Tsunade remembered doing something similar with Mito. The woman had loved pulling a young Tsunade onto her lap and blowing on her chubby cheeks. She had also loved to curl up with her head in Mito-obaa-chan’s lap and feel her old, but kind, hands stroke her hair.

Konan relaxed into Uzu’s lap and carried on playing.

“Uzu-kaa-chan isn’t an Uzumaki or a Yayoi or a Fuuma or an Obake or a Hou-o or a Shi. She is Uzushio. Uzushio made flesh and blood.” Konan said blithely.

Tsunade’s jaw dropped and a trickle of sweat ran down her forehead and cheek.

“That’s not possible.”

“Why not?” Konan asked. “Kaa-chan is here and real. So, it is possible.”

Uzu sniggered at Tsunade’s awed, confused and overwhelmed face and body language. It was unfathomable. Unbelievable. Unexplainable and yet… The familiarity Tsunade had been recalling wasn’t that of a person. It was that of her visit to Uzushio. The one trip she had ever made to the island of her grandmother’s birth before the Fall.

She remembered running on the beaches with other pre-genin, climbing the cliffs using chakra, walking and dancing round the waterfalls. She remembered her grandfather showing her the trees
that were different but not so different to the ones in Konoha. She remembered hearing a voice singing her to sleep during their visit.

“You know what, Tsunade-ba-chan?” Konan chirped as she won the game. “You should come with us. Uzu-kaa-chan is taking us back to Uzushio for a while. We’re going to rebuild Uzushiogakure. You could come too. Be a part of our family.”

“Rebuild Uzushiogakure?” Tsunade whispered. “But, no one can get onto Uzushio.”

“It would be very embarrassing if I couldn’t get back to myself.” Uzu said dryly with a raised eyebrow. “Konn’s offer is valid. If you want Tsunade-chan, you can come with us. Maybe, you can find some peace. At least we can offer you a place to rest and hide out from your loan sharks.”

Tsunade waved her hand dismissively. What loan sharks? Yet she couldn’t deny a desire to go. A part of her within the shattered pieces that wanted to see if the island of her memories would accept her. If the place that called to her, that had been calling to her since she lost Dan, begging for her to come and simply live, would welcome a broken woman.

Konoha had taken and taken from her. Would Uzushio be the same?

“I want to go.” Tsunade said firmly. “I want to… be.”

Uzu held out her hand.

“Well, the best we can do is try.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
ojii-chan - grandad, less formal than ojii-san which could be considered grandfather
oji-chan - uncle, or formally oji-san
Hanafuda - a Japanese card game consisting of 12 sets of four cards that are representative of different plants and the months.
The field is the laying out of eight cards which the players match with cards in their hand.
A yaku is a combination of cards that earns points e.g. boar, deer, butterfly (like Ino-Shika-Cho) which are three different cards from different months but when combined create a yaku and earn points.
Koi-Koi is called when a player scores a yaku and wishes to continue play. This is usually done when they do not have enough points to win the hand or believe that they could increase their score.

If I missed anything out I’d suggest Google because there are lots of different versions of Hanafuda and I only know how to play a couple of them. I will try to answer questions if you have them!

Next Chapter - Tsunade Part Four:
Tsunade is questioning her mental health. Uzu acts like a Mama and protects her babies. Tsunade has a tiny breakdown when there is more blood but learns more about
the wacky family she has found herself tagging along with.
Tsunade - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Tsunade Part Four:
Tsunade is questioning her mental health. Uzu acts like a Mama and protects her babies. Tsunade has a tiny breakdown when there is more blood, but learns more about the wacky family she has found herself tagging along with.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! When we reach 200 kudos you'll get a double update!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tsunade

(Part Four)

* 

Tsunade flung herself behind a tree trunk and curled her body over Kabuto, protecting him from the blast that followed mere seconds later. There was a howl of fury and Matatabi went racing by, claws out and swatting at the shinobi attacking them.

Konan, Nagato and Yahiko were in the middle of the fray, darting around and attacking as a perfect trio. Jiraiya had taught them well, she could see it in the foundations of their actions. A cold fury was empowering them.

Kisame was swinging his blade too, leaping and landing on the enemy, holding one of them up by their head, their arms scrambling at his wrist and their feet swinging wildly. The shark-toothed boy was snarling viciously. His teeth bared like an animal, savage, wild, untamed.

Utakata was floating above them all, but his bubbles were filling the air with their deceptively innocent forms and racing after the enemy, splattering them with acid. Saiken was present within Utakata’s bubble, his body large enough to shield Utakata and his six tails wiggling in distress.

Tsunade glanced down at Kabuto who was clutching his tortoise to his chest and his eyes were wide as he watched his siblings fight. Shizune was kneeling down next to Uzu and Tsunade could see that the woman wasn’t moving.

“I’m going to tear you apart!” Yugito/Matatabi yowled. “You tried to take Kisame and Utakata, you upset Tsunade and you hurt Uzu-nee!”

Kisame roared back at the Nibi and the two moved in unison to plough through their enemies.

Tsunade thought she had fought monsters before. She thought the enemies she had faced on the
battlefield had been hell incarnate, terrifying shinobi with unbelievable powers. But now, surrounded by Uzu’s children who were all incandescent with rage and pain… She realised she had never truly seen monsters. And these monsters might have just lost their saviour and guardian.

What wouldn’t a monster do to save their mother?

*

Travelling with Uzu and her tribe was an ordeal. Tsunade and Shizune were used to walking for hours and sleeping outdoors when necessary but they had never experienced such chaos.

Utakata could seemingly fall asleep anywhere, Yugito was a ball of energy that was (quite frankly) draining, the Ame trio were little hellions who seemed to have made a game out of stealing Tonton from Shizune, Kabuto was a creepy little spawn who stared at her with big eyes (even when she was asleep) and Kisame – well he seemed to delight in tormenting Shizune too and Tsunade guessed he had a crush on her student.

The only sane one seemed to be Uzu and this was a woman who professed to be an island!

And then, just to top it all off, two of the brats weren’t just little hellspawn but Jinchūriki with Bijuu that could materialise outside of their host’s bodies whenever and whatever size they wanted…

Tsunade had given herself a medical exam. Her results informed her that her slip in the bath several days ago had not caused brain damage. She was as fit and healthy as ever. In conclusion, Uzu’s children were hellspawns, the woman might be certifiably insane and Tsunade and Shizune were willingly involved with the chaos.

Travelling with Uzu also consisted of a previously undiscussed condition. No copious amounts of alcohol. She had permitted the Slug Princess just one, bottle of sake if they stopped in a town or village.

If the memories of the war and her grief hadn’t already driven her to drink, Tsunade was certain that travelling with the hellspawn would have.

*

They were back in the Land of Fire, heading up the coast towards Uzushio when everything went to hell in a handbasket.

Apparently, Kisame and Utakata were rogue nin. They didn’t know how, but Mist found them. The attack when it came, was with a force greater than anyone would have anticipated.

Uzu was the first to notice it and she flung Utakata out of the way of the bladed chains that had hurtled out of the morning mist towards him. They had all heard the squelch as the kunai on the chains sank into her legs and arms.

Tsunade was walking near Utakata, the Jinchūriki had been discussing some poem or other with Kabuto and she had been absently listening in on their conversation when Uzu switched places and flung both boys at her.

The Sannin caught both boys in her arms and then felt the familiar splatter of hot blood on her face.

Her wail drew the attention of everyone, Mist and Uzu’s children alike. Kabuto squirmed frantically in her arms and began patting at her face with his sleeve. Utakata fell from her grip as if
he was boneless and began blowing bubbles.

“You’re alright Tsunade-ba-chan.” Kabuto muttered. “I’m gonna get it all off.”

Around them fighting erupted. Shizune darted forward and pulled the bladed chains out of Uzu, flinging them away from the still woman’s body.

Matatabi burst into existence, Yugito encased inside her and her arrival sent a wave of terror through the Mist shinobi.

“They have two Jinchūriki! Nibi and Rokubi!” One of them announced before scrambling frantically away from the lunging ghost cat.

Konan sent a wave of paper to guard Shizune as she worked on Uzu and Utakata added his bubbles to her paper as an additional defence.

Tsunade could hear all this happening as if it were far away. Her breath felt caught in her throat, her lungs aching for air, her skin pouring with sweat, her eyes transfixed on the droplets of blood spattered on the ground.

A sharp slap on her cheek roused her somewhat and she met Kabuto’s frightened eyes. Awareness rushed back to her and she dodged a Mist shinobi who had surged towards them. Kabuto clung to her and she wrapped one arm around him and used the other to send a chakra enhanced punch at their assailant.

Bones cracked beneath her fist and she turned before blood could spurt from his mouth.

Matatabi came rushing by and shouted at them to take cover.

Tsunade flung herself behind a tree and braced as a shockwave ripped up trees (root and all) and broke the ground.

Her ears ringing slightly, she looked down to check on Kabuto. He was crying and looking over towards Uzu.

“You have to help Tsunade-oba-chan. Please help Okaa-san.”

“I-I-I-I.” Tsunade stammered. “I can’t, the blood, it, I can’t.”

Kabuto tucked Genbu-chan into his shirt.

“You don’t need to see to heal. I’ll cover your eyes and stop the blood.” His childish voice pleaded.

Tsunade staggered upright, trying to summon the resolve to move, to go. Her feet weren’t obeying.

Then, calm fell over the fight. Golden light pulsed up from the soil in ribbons and everyone ceased fighting.

Tsunade stared as Uzu stood upright, panting slightly and leaning on Shizune. There were a few holes in her robes where the blades had sunk in but there were no obvious signs of trauma. Shizune was standing strong, braced to take the woman’s weight and her eyes flicked over the battlefield, lingering on Tsunade and Kabuto before moving on to assess the Mist nin who seemed to have lost all will to fight.

“What did you do?” Tsunade murmured.
“It’s a seal.” Uzu licked her dry lips. “I drew it whilst Shizune-chan was healing me. Not my best work. A bit sloppy to be honest, as I was more focussed on calming everyone down and removing the urge to fight but, it’ll do for now.”

“You made a seal whilst you were bleeding out?” Tsunade queried.

“I wasn’t bleeding out. Don’t make it sound like I had the Shinigami hovering over me.” Uzu frowned crossly. “Most of the wounds were shallow, the majority of the blades didn’t even penetrate my robes. A couple managed to sink in however because they are designed to restrain a Jinchūriki. But Shizune-chan was able to pull them out and heal me in a few seconds.”

A human Yugito suddenly slammed into Uzu and Shizune, her face buried in the woman’s stomach. Kisame was there a second later and slipping to wrap his arm around Uzu’s waist. The Ame trio all retreated to form a defensive line between Uzu and the Mist nin and Utakata floated down to hover above the group.

Kabuto tugged at Tsunade’s shirt and the woman hastened to carry the youngest over.

“Now, what shall we do with these Mist nin.” Uzu hummed. “Memory wipe and a fear of treading near Uzushio I think. That should do it. Maybe I’ll make them think the ghosts of Uzushiogakure are lingering and that they’re seeking revenge for Mist’s part in the Fall.”

The woman snickered. She actually snickered. Tsunade resisted the urge to check her with her own medical chakra. Surely Shizune would have noticed brain damage. Yahiko joined in the snickering and was promptly elbowed by a frowning Nagato.

Uzu held up her hand and opened her mouth to begin reciting the words for the seal but was stopped.

“Wait Uzu.” Kisame growled. “I want one of them to remember. I want him to take a message back to Mist.”

Uzu looked up at Kisame. Tsunade looked too. There was a resolve in his face. The woman shrugged and gestured.

“Take your pick.”

Kisame reluctantly left Uzu’s side and strode through the battlefield to the commanding officer, a Mist nin in an Anbu mask. He pulled the man up and leaned in close, filling the nin’s field of vision with sharp teeth and a menacing face. They couldn’t hear what Kisame said but they all saw the shinobi go limp and nod weakly.

“All done?” Uzu asked when Kisame had dropped the shinobi unceremoniously and stalked back to her side. He grunted and pulled a crying Yugito from Uzu’s stomach and lifted her into his arms.

“Just get on with it, woman.” He grunted and turned his attention to Yugito, dismissing his enemies.

Tsunade watched in awe as Uzu drew in the air with chakra and murmured softly. The seal was beautiful, glowing gold, just like the one beneath their feet that had calmed everyone down and removed the urge to fight. This seal floated in the air before seemingly splitting into smaller versions which sank into every single enemy shinobi (except the one Kisame had threatened). A different seal sank into that one and Tsunade later found out that Uzu had removed the memory of Utakata and Yugito from him. Whilst she would allow Kisame to send a threat back to Mist to warn them off from attacking him, she would not allow a threat to the younger children and the Bijuu.
Later that evening, on the shores opposite Uzushio, Tsunade sank down into the sand next to Uzu and checked the woman over with her chakra.

“You’re going to have a few scars I’m afraid. Shizune is good but she hasn’t developed the skills to remove all remnants of a wound.” Tsunade judged her apprentice’s work.

Uzu shrugged. “This body is only temporary. One day it will expire, and I will return to myself. A few scars are nothing to be concerned over.”

Tsunade sucked in a sharp breath. It hissed between her teeth.

“How can you say that so nonchalantly?!” She snarled.

“Death is inevitable.” Uzu looked at her. “The Shinigami comes for us all, even me. But when he does, I want him to see my life and all the children I found, the home I rebuilt for them, the world I am trying to make safe and peaceful for them. I want him to see me being what I have been for almost as long as I can recall.”

“What’s that?” Tsunade whispered and leaned in close.

“A mother.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Tsunade Part Five: The Family is back on Uzushio. Tsunade cannot understand how Uzu can return to the site of such loss. Kisame gives out more advice.
Tsunade - Part Five

Chapter Summary

Tsunade Part Five: The Family is back on Uzushio. Tsunade cannot understand how Uzu can return to the site of such loss. Kisame gives out more advice.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments! This story has reached over 100 subscriptions in less than a month and the bookmarks are nearly at 100 too!

This is the final instalment of Tsunade (for now) so I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tsunade

(Part Five)

Kintsugi – the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver or platinum.

* Uzushiogakure made Tsunade’s already battered heart throb even more. She knew, logically, that the village would not have remained intact. That the buildings would have been destroyed, that there would be piles of rubble and shattered homes everywhere. But knowing is different to seeing.

What she couldn’t comprehend was how Uzu, (who if her words were true) had witnessed the Fall and lost all her children, could walk through the ruins without breaking down in grief?

Walking through the ruined settlement Tsunade saw the items that had been carefully laid out next to doorsteps or crumbling walls. Toys, dolls, kite frames, weapons, a teacup, a single jewelled earring, a shoe, a fan, a scroll, a family photo, a dog’s collar. The list of possessions was endless and varied from home to home.

On venturing inside she found that the interiors were frozen in time. A pile of laundry on a chair ready to be put away. Dishes left on the draining board. Homework laid out on a table, books coated with dust and the inked writing faded from the paper. A table set up for a meal everything but the food present. A newspaper abandoned on a bed, the thin paper crumbling at her slight touch. A child’s bed dishevelled with the sheets thrown back and a toy dropped on the floor. A ramen stall, with stools covered in a thick layer of grime and dust, knives laid out on the workbench and scored chopping boards ready to receive vegetables lay long untouched or even unseen. In a clothing shop faded signs announced a new clothing line and the mannikins were draped with dust sheets ready for the unveiling which never happened.
And this was just in the buildings, homes, businesses she could access. There were far more that had been utterly destroyed and lay in crumbling heaps with flowers and vines growing from the spoil.

Tsunade had never seen a place like this. A preserved moment when people had been going about their lives only to have been suddenly and abruptly halted. It was as if the village had been left, waiting for the occupants to come back. Only, there wasn’t anyone left to return.

* 

“How can she bring you here?” Tsunade mentioned to Kisame later that evening. He was cutting vegetables and prepping fish for their evening meal.

“What do you mean?” He tossed a piece of carrot in his mouth and crunched down on it.

“I mean, this place. The village. It’s…”

He set his knife down and peered at her. Of all Uzu’s children Kisame seemed to be the most observant and all his actions were orientated around Uzu. She was like a lodestone to all the children that they gravitated and were pulled towards but Kisame, Kisame was incredibly loyal. Tsunade had seen how he moved to support Uzu when she was injured, carried the younger children when they were tired, held back from killing blows and every time his eyes went back to Uzu as if seeking her approval or checking she was there.

“Uzu is a mother but she is also this land. You can feel it, if you let yourself.” He began. “She is in everything here. How could she not come back to herself?”

“But this village, it’s like a mausoleum. A monument to the dead.” Tsunade protested. “It’s like the residents are going to come back at any moment. How can you all live with ghosts like that?”

Kisame scoffed.

“You want to see a mausoleum, a monument, a tribute to the dead?”

He whistled and a russet coloured fox appeared in the doorway to the garden.

“Follow the fox.”

Tsunade looked at him. Her nose wrinkled up in disbelief.

“Follow the fox.”

“That’s what I said, you old bat. Now go and see a true homage to Uzushiogakure. I have hungry brats to feed.” Kisame grunted and picked his knife up twirling it in his fingers. Tsunade took the hint and slipped her shoes on and followed the fox.

It loped ahead of her, pausing every now and again to allow her to catch up with it and glancing back as if checking she hadn’t gotten lost. Through the cracked and caved in streets, past ruined and frozen homes and shops she went.

The fox led her to an estate where the rooftops were not the same as the rest of the buildings in the village. Instead of red sand tiles covering the buildings there was a different stone, black with specks of white, in large slabs crowning white walls.

Further into the estate Tsunade was led until she thought they had left the perimeter of the village
far behind them. The sweet scent of wildflowers tickled her nose and long flowers and grasses tickled at her legs and hands.

Tsunade froze as the fox stopped at the edge of a clearly defined area and her eyes took in mound after mound after mound. It was a graveyard. She sucked in a sharp breath. There were so many graves here. So many lives buried in the soil. Each grave was marked, a seal with their name on it untarnished by rain and wind. Flowers bloomed from the grass covered mounds speckling the rises with white, red, violet, yellow, blue, orange – a kaleidoscope of colours.

Movement further into the cemetery caught Tsunade’s attention and she watched Uzu sink down next to a wide grave. The woman was as elegant as ever in her movements and Tsunade absently wondered at how she showed both care in looking after her clothing but at the same time was willing to settle down on damp grass or mud and potentially ruin the lavish silks.

Uzu was a juxtaposition and it made Tsunade’s heart ache. An impossible, possible woman who apparently hadn’t shattered under the weight of so much death and grief.

She cautiously approached Uzu, reluctant to disturb the woman as she spoke to the grave.

“I retrieved it. I know you would have hated it to become something so coveted. After all, Shota made it just for you Keiko. I remember how you were so upset when it was accidentally broken. But it looks better now, I think. More beautiful for the broken parts.” Uzu murmured softly, her hand resting on the edge of the mound.

Tsunade watched as she pulled a bowl from her sleeve. Made of deep red clay and glazed with a glossy finish it was a beautifully simple piece of pottery. At some point it had been broken and someone had painstakingly put it back together. Gold filled the cracks, a network or spiderweb binding the pieces together.

Uzu was right, it did look beautiful despite its damage.

Tsunade sank down next to Uzu and looked at the bowl in her hand.

“Shota was a potter. He made the most exquisite pieces. They were sold all over the Great Nations and throughout the mainland. But his best works were always the simpler ones. Or at least so I thought.” Uzu said wistfully.

“Keiko was a cook. She made the best ramen on the island. Shota hated ramen but he would go into her stall, order her special broth with its secret ingredient, and talk to her for hours.”

“Sounds like he really loved her.” Tsunade commented. Uzu made a noise of agreement.

“He eventually decided that she was the one, even though he couldn’t stand ramen. He made her this bowl as a courting gift and presented it to her parents and asked for her hand. They agreed and the pair married not long after. They had just had their third child when their eldest accidentally knocked the bowl onto the floor and it smashed. Keiko was devastated. He had made that bowl with all his love. He had given her many other things throughout their years together, including three beloved children, but the bowl held a special significance.”

Uzu reached over and nestled the bowl on top of the grave. The gold cracks caught the light of the sinking sun and made Tsunade’s eyes sting.

“Shota fixed it up, took him hours to piece it together again and then he painstakingly glued it all back together with the gold lacquer. Keiko never used it again, but it sat proudly in their house. During the Fall, a shinobi opportunistically lifted many items from many houses, including this
bowl. He recognised Shota’s mark on the bottom and decided that it would be a great talking piece for a noble lord.”

Tsunade winced. It was not uncommon for shinobi to take spoils from battles but there was something inhuman about taking from civilian houses and selling them on for money.

“But I found it and took it back.” Uzu grinned sheepishly. “And then I bumped into you. And you became a part of Shota and Keiko’s story.”

“So that’s why the Lord’s guards were chasing you.” Tsunade raised an eyebrow. Uzu shrugged and patted the grave.

“It wasn’t his. Even if he had paid for it. It was Keiko’s. And she deserved to have it back.”

“Did they fight during the attack? Keiko and Shota?”

Uzu pursed her lips. “Depends on your definition of fighting. They weren’t shinobi and they didn’t have any skills for fighting but they were two of the village’s eldest residents and they calmed the civilians, organised for the children to be gathered and then with other adults formed a blockade to allow the children to escape. They died holding each other’s hands.”

Tsunade swallowed the lump in her throat. Dan had died with her hands pressed into the hole in him. With her tears streaming down and mixed with his blood and the rain. She thought it would have been nice to die holding his hand.

“How do you do it? How do you come back here? Doesn’t it tear you up inside? I feel as though I cannot breathe sometimes with missing my loved ones so much.” Tsunade clawed at her chest, her nails leaving red scrapes on the skin above her heart.

Uzu pulled Tsunade’s hands down and cradled them between hers.

“It does hurt. I watched Keiko and Shota grow up. I watched everyone who has ever been born on this land grow, love, hate, cry, shout, laugh, learn and die. Some of them died naturally, long before the Fall. Others were cut down and I could only watch.”

“But why aren’t you like me?” Tsunade sobbed.

“Because my grief is not the same as yours.” Uzu reprimanded softly. “My grief is for lost children and the promise of what they could have been. It is no lesser or greater than yours despite the number of children whose graves I dug. Your grief is yours and yours alone. It is your loss.”

Uzu tilted Tsunade’s face up and the Slug Princess stared through watery eyes at Uzu’s own mournful expression.

“You know, I don’t think humans have ever been very good at death. You live so strongly and so passionately that you rail against it. But it is crueller to those left behind. And Tsunade,” Uzu cupped her cheek. “It is alright to hurt and be angry and be sad and feel so lonely.”

Tsunade sobbed and crumpled into Uzu’s lap.

“I miss them so much! I cannot remember how they smelt, how their hair felt, what their laugh sounded like. All I can remember is the pain on Dan’s face, his blood soaking my skin, Nawaki’s body dripping with blood and covered with a blood-stained sheet! It hurts so much!” She wailed.

Uzu carded her fingers through Tsunade’s hair and bent down to kiss the woman’s head.
“And that is alright.”

“Am I broken?”

“Does it matter? Remember, broken things can be more beautiful, it all depends on how they are put back together.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Keiko – meaning lucky/blessed child
Shota – meaning fly, big

Next Chapter - Kisame Part Five: Kisame isn't happy with Uzu. They have a deep conversation and Kisame makes some plans.
Kisame Part Five

Chapter Summary

Kisame Part Five: Kisame isn't happy with Uzu. They have a deep conversation and Kisame makes some plans.

Chapter Notes

I say this every time but thank you sincerely for the subscriptions, bookmarks, Kudos and comments! If we reach 200 kudos you'll get a double update tomorrow!

I love all your comments, please continue to let me know what you think! And I love reading your theories and ideas too so don't be afraid to send them my way. :D

On to Kisame!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kisame

(Part Five)

Kisame snapped a few weeks after the began rebuilding. He woke early one morning and slipped out of his room, leaving Samehada behind and not even bothering with shoes. He needed to pound something, hit something, break something. But everything in Uzushiogakure was already broken or far too precious to destroy. He was also terrified that he would lash out at the younger kids or Shizune.

Tsunade could take a hit from him, they had sparred and dealt hard blows to each other but they both walked away without any broken bones or severe injuries.

Unable to beat anyone or destroy anything Kisame took himself down to the beach. The ocean called to him and he charged into the beckoning waters and began to swim. He cut through the waves, slicing the water with his pointed hands, his muscles straining as they propelled and pulled him forward.

He swam until the sun rose and the tide began to recede. Finally exhausted he lay on his back beneath Kokuō’s torii. The waves, wind and salt air had bleached the red paint on the torii and he thought about whether or not he should offer to repaint it and maybe all the torii. It wasn’t as if there were any priests or miko at the temple who could do it. Part of him felt that maybe they should be left as they were, marked by the passage of time. Weathered but not worn.

*“That seemed like an intense swimming session.” Uzu’s voice came from the direction of the
island.

Kisame shrugged his sore shoulders in response.

“May I?” She gestured to the wet sand beside him and when he gave no indication she sank down, burying her bare feet and toes in the sand. Squidging it between her toes and wrinkling her nose in delight.

Kisame waited. Uzu waited. He couldn’t outlast her; it wasn’t a talent he particularly had. He would never be the type of shinobi to lie patiently in wait for his prey. He enjoyed the fight too much. And he was still itching for one now, be it verbal or physical.

“Why the hell didn’t you dodge?” He broke first.

“Are you referring to the incident with the Mist shinobi?”

He snarled. “Of course, I am! You should have dodged their chains! I know you were focussed on Utakata and Kabuto and I would never expect you to just watch them get hurt but why didn’t you dodge?!”

Uzu rubbed sand in her palm, exposing a shell from within the clump and smoothed the sand off it with her fingers.

“I’m not a shinobi, Kisame.”

“I know that.”

“Listen, stop barking at me and think.” She halted him and he subsided to a low constant growl. “I am not a shinobi. I can sneak into fortresses and castles but my skills are not that of a trained shinobi. I can dodge in a battle because my enemy expects an attack and not a constant movement. When in battle I can also use my energy to predict and circumvent attacks. The wind and the water and the soil can tell me where an enemy will go. In an unexpected attempt like the one the other day I was not using my energy.”

“But you still could have dodged!”

“If I had dodged where would the chains have gone?” She questioned and he fell silent. “I know you, Kisame. You can read a battlefield and an enemy. You think and you understand tactics and reactions. Where would the blades and chains have gone?”

Kisame replayed the moment in his head. Utakata and Kabuto flung towards Tsunade, the Sannin taking them into her arms and doubling over to try and protect them, the blades on the chains sinking into Uzu and glancing off her robes and spread arms. Tsunade’s face splattered with Uzu’s blood as it arced through the air to land on her.

He knew. He’d known the whole time.

Uzu sat silently.

“They would have hit Tsunade and the brats.” He eventually murmured and lifted his arm to press it over his eyes.

“Hmm. And you know me.”

“Keh, you’d throw yourself between us and an entire army.” He said bitterly.
“Probably. It is strange to me.” Uzu said slowly. “This body feels things, emotions, so intensely. I literally have no control sometimes. It moves to show affection easily. To protect my children, well…”

Kisame bit his lower lip. “I know. Doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“Would you not do the same for Yugito, me or the others?”

“Depends.”

Uzu laughed.

“You would. You know you would.”

He scoffed and sat up, dropping his hands into his crossed legs. Uzu leaned over and pressed herself against his side and he luxuriated in her presence.

“I just – I don’t know what I would do if you died Uzu.” He whispered. It was so hard to be vulnerable. It made him antsy.

“I don’t know what I would do either. I’ll tell you what I hope you would do.” Uzu offered. He nodded and fiddled with the shell she handed over to him, running his calloused fingers over the spiral surface and taking in the bumpy texture. The repetitive motion and the tactile feeling soothed him somewhat.

“I hope you would bring my body back to Uzushio if I fell on the mainland. I hope you would look after Yugito and the others as you always have. I hope you wouldn’t be too angry with me. I hope you would continue to build a home and a family and strengthen the bonds you have. I hope you would not seek revenge. I hope you would find peace and love. I hope you would live a long and happy life.”

Kisame closed his eyes. “Shinobi don’t tend to live long lives.”

“Hmm, that’s because they’re so absorbed in bettering their village. Everything is done for the village or for power or revenge or out of hatred. I haven’t seen or met many noble shinobi. The samurai are slightly better at living without conflict.”

“I can’t promise that I’d do anything you hope for,” Kisame whispered. “But I would try.”

“I know you would darling.” Uzu knelt up and pressed a kiss to Kisame’s cheek. He let her and didn’t scoff or push her away.

“Now, are you going to come back to the house? The others will have ransacked the kitchen by now.” Uzu teased.

“If you keep collecting strays, we’re going to need a bigger home.” Kisame groaned. He pushed himself up and brushed off the worst of the sand clinging to his skin and sleep trousers. “Nagato snores you know. It’s amazing a kid that quiet can make such a racket when he’s not even conscious. And there’s four of them sharing that room. Yugito and Konan are sharing with Shizune and now you have moved into the study to give Tsunade your room.”

Uzu had stood too and was looking up at the sky pensively. She hummed and slipped her arm into his, letting him escort her back to their family.

“Well, I suppose you’ll just have to build a bigger home for us then. You can get Tsunade to help,
and there are some architects and builders coming in the next few weeks with the returning civilians and shinobi."

He scoffed.

"Me, build a home?"

"Why not? We need a bigger place already and the likelihood of our family not growing further is almost infinitesimal. If you had a say in its design, you could make it a home and find ways of protecting our family."

"Huh, I did think that there are ways to improve the security. Not that I think anyone would be able to slip past your notice or Uzushio’s but it would add a further layer of protection. And it might make some of us feel even more secure." Kisame mused. He rather liked the notion.

"I leave it in your capable hands. But try not to turn it into a fortress. It is to be a home first." Uzu teased him and he glared at her.

*

The arrival of the returning citizens of Uzushigakure was a spectacle. Uzu knew when the boats arrived at the edges of the whirlpools and she gathered everyone together to greet them.

Their slapdash family assembled in the old port, tucked into a bay that faced away from the mainland and towards the open ocean. Uzu had told the citizens where to meet and they had gathered together in the Land of Tea and used the money she had saved to buy sturdy fishing and shipping vessels.

Her directions had instructed them to arrive away from the mainland and when she parted the fog and calmed the whirlpools, several boatloads of families and shinobi sailed back home.

The old Uzushio port was naturally formed, spits of stone made berths for the ships and large immoveable rocks (unless you were Tsunade) made great mooring points. Hollows in the bay’s cliffs were filled with the remnants of store rooms, rotted doors and rusty bars that once held goods safe. On the lowest level rotten stalls lay collapsed and green with moss and plant life. The footpath in and out of the bay was a gently winding track, wide enough for two carts to pass, and led out towards the mountain before skirting down to the eastern entrance of the village.

Kisame and the children spent the day helping the citizens unload the boats and ships and find suitable homes for them to reclaim or claim (apart from Kabuto who spent the day with Tsunade organising medical supplies that had been brought in on one of the ships).

The eldest of the returners had wept at the sight of their village, and so had many of the adults and teenagers who had been young enough to recall their homeland. The youngest children (of which there were far too many in Kisame’s opinion) seemed to find the whole day simultaneously exciting and creepy as they moved through the ruined village.

Some of the citizens were able to move back into their homes that had been perfectly preserved, save for the dust and dirt that had accumulated. Others claimed homes that Uzu knew would not be needed by any who had yet to be found or not yet made it back to Uzushio.

Despite the influx of over a hundred new citizens, there were still many houses left empty.

Kisame had introduced himself to the architects and builders and they had spent several hours going through the village and assessing which buildings should be cleared, which should be
knocked down and which could be made whole once more. They had created a map with different markings on it and soon had a survey of the whole village.

* 

“I want this area, if that’s alright.” Kisame pointed to a large space where several small homes had been. It was on the edge of the village, towards the northern entrance where the cherry trees lay.

“Sure, what do you want it for?” The lead builder and architect asked.

“Uzu said I could build a home for her and my family.” Kisame said gruffly. “It needs to be big. I want to knock down those houses, they’re marked for destruction anyway, and build a larger structure there. There’s also enough space around it for the kids to play and practice in.”

“You’ve thought about this a lot, haven’t you?” The architect slapped his shoulder and Kisame grunted. “You’re a good kid. Well, tell me what ideas you have.”

Kisame leaned over and pulled out a sheaf of paper with sketches on it.

“I want it to be traditional, with an engawa, inner courtyards, several bedrooms, a large kitchen... Oh, and I want a nightingale floor.”

“You don’t want a lot!” The architect roared with laughter.

Kisame shrugged.

“It’s for my family. I want to build a home for them.”

* 

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

engawa - a wrap around porch or walkway in traditional Japanese architecture. It can be covered and/or enclosed.
Nightingale floors - are floors that make a chirping sound when walked on. Traditionally used in temples and palaces, the most famous example is Nijo Castle in Kyoto.

Next Chapter - Interlude Three Growing: Uzu's children are all growing in different ways. Snapshots into their development in multitude of forms.
Interlude Three - Growing

Chapter Summary

Interlude Three Growing: Uzu's children are all growing in different ways. Snapshots into their development in multitude of forms.

Chapter Notes

We reached over 200 Kudos! You know what that means, double update! So, this chapter is the first one of tonight's updates and will be followed swiftly by Utakata Part Four!

I'm also expanding the storyline with little vignettes/side stories so this has now become a mini series with ITAV as the main story. The first of these vignettes has been posted and is called 'Glory'. It looks at the Fall of Uzushiogakure from three alternate perspectives and was suggested by SecretHideOut. Go check it out after you've read today's two updates!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Interlude Three

(Growing)

*

Strong and tough as he was, Kisame suffered growing pains. Tsunade said it was because he used his muscles so much every day, but it wasn’t as if he could stop. He was an active person, his body needed to move and so did his mind.

Late in the evening he would be consumed by aching in both his legs, so intense that he would have to sit down where he was and breath slowly. There would be pain in his muscles in his back, arms, and torso and sometimes it would keep him awake. He would lie there in the night gritting his sharp teeth together and feeling the points of them piercing his lips on particularly painful nights.

Sometimes it even drove him to the edge of screaming.

Tsunade checked him over but there was little she could do, except ease the throbbing or give him a pain pill. Uzu however had more natural remedies.

On particularly bad nights she would know (and he never worked out how) and would come to his room and massage his legs, placing warm towels on his legs and lying behind him on his futon and rubbing her hands gently over his back and arms. The warmth from her hands and the firm pressure soothed his aches and he would often be able to drift off whilst she hummed and soothed him.
She also taught him how to slow down. To stop and rest in between construction jobs, to soak in the bath after training, to stretch out in slow movement patterns in the evening so that his muscles would release the stress and tension of the day.

It didn’t fix it (Tsunade said it would fade as he entered adulthood) but it did make things better for him. And secretly (because he would never admit it) he enjoyed Uzu’s tender touches and mothering although his blustering and scoffing would never indicate his pleasure at being cared for.

* 

Kabuto thought he had begun to understand what ‘love’ was to him.

It was spending time with Tsunade-oba-chan and Shizune-nee. Learning about medical jutsu and getting excited hands ruffling his hair when he succeeded.  
It was curling up in Utakata’s lap and reading stories and poems with him and Saiken.  
It was learning to swim with Kisame whose hands were always there to catch him when he dipped under the water.  
It was sitting between Yahiko and Konan at mealtimes and being given the tastiest and best portions and having them slip extra vegetables onto his plate.  
It was snoozing with Nagato during the rainy season when the rain made the other boy maudlin and wanting to make him feel less sad.  
It was teasing Matatabi with grass stalks and watching the normally stoic Bijuu pounce like a housecat.  
It was being warm every night, not feeling the sharp biting beast in his belly for food, wanting to make his family (and how amazing that word sounded) happy and share in their happiest, saddest and most euphoric moments.

It was Uzu, pressing kisses to his forehead and hair without a second thought. Being able to go and speak to her without worrying about her thinking she was a freak. It was being accepted and wanted and showered with affection and not ever having to give anything back.

But Kabuto liked to give Uzu his own soft kisses on her cheek. He liked holding her hand as they walked to the beach. He liked cuddling with her in the early hours of the morning before everyone else woke up. He liked teasing Yahiko and Nagato and watching Uzu laugh as he ran verbal circles around them.

Making Uzu and his siblings and his oba-chan happy was something Kabuto loved to do. It made him feel hot and safe and full. He still didn’t fully understand what love was, but he didn’t think he’d mind spending the rest of his life finding out.

* 

Puberty slammed into Konan like a tidal wave. There had been a moment of horror when she woke up and visited the toilet only to discover blood seeping into her sleep pants. Her face had flushed, and tears had rushed to her eyes.

Funnily enough it was Kisame who alerted Uzu and Tsunade (maybe it was the shark in him that could smell blood). A flushed, stammering, Kisame who bundled a tearful Konan up in a blanket and carried her to Uzu’s room, depositing her on the still slumbering red head. A growling Kisame who yanked Tsunade and Shizune from their rooms and shoved them in muttering about the birds and the bees.

After it had all been explained to her, mainly by Tsunade and Shizune (as Uzu didn’t experience
such womanly problems), Konan felt much happier.

If she had a couple of days a month where she had strange desires for specific foods, wanted to have intense cuddles with Uzu and Yugito, burst into tears when Yahiko’s teasing went too far or screamed at the boys for running around too loudly well… It was all part of being female.

And if Kisame always made sure her favourite snacks were available at that time of the month, it was a secret between the two of them.

*

Yahiko began noticing things. Things like how soft Konan’s hair was, how kind she was. Things like how sweet Nagato’s singing voice was, even if his voice was breaking and deepening. Things like how every now and again he had to subdue the urge to press his lips against their cheeks. How he wanted to hold their hands.

He didn’t understand what these urges were and so he kept them close to his chest. His own little secret until he could find out what they were. For now, he was happy just to spend time with his two best friends.

*

Tsunade felt her broken pieces being mended and stuck together more and more solidly. There was a peace and an acceptance that had come over her whilst on Uzushio.

She could have her bad days, when she just wanted to lie in bed, or scream into the air over the cliff, or huddle in the cherry tree grove with silent tears pouring down her cheeks. But after each and every bad day there was a good day.

Good days were:

When she worked to rebuild their home, lifting timbers that would take several grown men with ease, mixing up barrels of cement, laying down the floorboards in their new house with Kisame, setting them carefully and deliberately to make the nightingale floor (because let’s face it, everyone was paranoid and having a defence like that couldn’t be a bad thing), it was a good day.

When she spent an afternoon with Kabuto and Shizune, her two students coming up with questions that she had never even considered. Conversations spiralling around and arguments evolving with proof being scrambled for, theories flung through the air and hastily recorded on scrolls.

When Yugito and Konan wanted a spa day and they would relax, treat their hair and skin. Letting Konan paint her nails a vibrant shade of red. Letting Yugito play with her hair, using her plethora of pins and sticks.

When she sat with Uzu in the weeping willow tree in the garden, hidden amongst the falling leaves cascading to the pond. Passing a sake bottle between them (just the one) and talking to Uzu about anything and everything. Hearing stories about her grandmother and grandfather, how he had fallen over himself when he met her, hearing about Kushina-chan who was falling in love in Konoha. Learning how Uzu could connect with her lost children even though they were far away.

Uzu never belittled or diminished Tsunade’s grief, even though the Slug Princess knew that Uzu had loved and lost more than she could ever comprehend.

Tsunade had her good days and her bad days but on Uzushio she was given a safe space to exist and grieve and mend. Maybe her cracks and missing pieces were slowly being put back together
with golden lacquer and maybe being broken was beautiful.

*

Nagato’s eyes grew more and more powerful. And it terrified him. There was so much power within him that sometimes he was afraid. Afraid that it could escape him and hurt others. He thought he would die if he hurt his family, if he hurt Konan and Yahiko.

Uzu noticed how he began to flinch away from everyone.

“Nagato, follow.” She leant down and whispered into his ear one morning, before the sun had risen and whilst everyone else was still asleep.

She led him out, through the slumbering village, to the cherry tree grove where a four tailed fox sat waiting.

“This is Tamashī. He is growing into his fourth tail at the moment.” Uzu explained. Nagato bowed and introduced himself. The fox flicked his tails and seemed to grin.

They followed Tamashī into a cave that Nagato couldn’t remember ever seeing before. A tunnel system wound and twisted and burrowed into the island and Uzu followed the fox without hesitation. Nagato held onto her kimono sleeve, an action he hadn’t done for several years.

The cavern they ended up in was different from the rest of Uzushio. It throbbed and pulsed with power. Gold light droplets spiralled down from the walls of the cave and landed on him. A heartbeat thudded in his ears and bones.

“Where are we?” Nagato whispered. He felt like he had to whisper. There was something about this place and the fox that made him feel awe and a measure of fear.

“This is our soul.” Uzu said.

“Your soul?”

“Well, the most human friendly environment and conduit we can make.” Uzu shrugged. “You know I’m not human, that this body is the heart of Uzushio made solid and flesh. This is our other part, our soul. We split ourselves to protect the land, sea, sky where we are imbued in every single piece.”

Nagato swallowed.

“There’s so much power here.” He whispered. He could feel it. It was a thunderstorm, a whirlpool, an avalanche, a volcano, a blizzard, the sun on the hottest day, the wind that screeched up the cliffs, the trees that burst with life, the animals that claimed Uzushio as their home. It was nature energy, wild, tumultuous, tempest and thick with the promise of life and death.

Uzu tilted her head and watched as his eyes took in more than others could ever hope to see.

“The Sage of Six Paths knew about us. It was why he made the Bijuu here. He knew that we could teach our children how to control their power, how to create and destroy. Because we are not particularly kind – nature is not kind. It simply is.”

“But you are kind to us.” Nagato protested and wheeled around to clutch Uzu’s arms. “You look after us and you love us. I can feel it!”
Uzu hugged him close and he nuzzled into her chest.

“I do love you. But we are not human. We learnt to create, to encourage growth on barren soil, to guide seeds on the wind, to form currents in the oceans, to pull earth up from the sea floor and pour magma out to extend ourselves. We destroy rotten trees tearing them up from the roots and plunging them into the cold ocean, we erode our cliffs to keep the soil healthy and make room for new growth. We could wipe out all living things on us and in us. But we do not. Because we love our creations and we control our power. You must learn to do the same Nagato.”

“I’m afraid of hurting my family.” He whispered.

“You will practice here. In our soul. There is little you could truly do in this place that we could not fix. We can counter any missteps you make. Do not worry little sea spray, we will not let you hurt yourself or our family.”

Nagato whimpered and squeezed Uzu tightly. He would do it. He would learn how to use his powers and when to use them. Then he could control them and keep his family safe.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Tamashī – means soul

Utakata Part Four will be posted shortly!
Chapter Summary

Everyone is settling into a new rhythm and way of life with the returning citizens of Uzushiogakure. Utakata doesn't know how he fits in. Paperwork is the bane of Uzu's life. She kidnaps Utakata to go and smell the flowers.

Chapter Notes

Double Update! If you haven’t read Interlude Three - Growing go back and read that first!

Done it? Okay onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Utakata

(Part Four)

* 

Since the arrival of the villagers, life for Uzu’s family had shifted slightly. Kabuto spent his time with Shizune who was teaching him in basic skills as well as encouraging his interest in medicine. Yahiko, Nagato and Konan spent part of the day training, another part helping out around the island and another part playing and being children. Kisame was heavily involved in the demolition and construction efforts as was Tsunade, when she wasn’t carrying out initial health examinations to begin a record for the hospital she intended to build.

Yugito helped out where she could but mostly kept an eye on the younger children with a couple of the older children. They had set up a house and garden for playing. Uzu had also asked a couple of the foxes to watch over the children and Matatabi and Saiken would often manifest and spend time with the younglings.

Saiken, in particular, enjoyed playing with the ‘tiny squishies’ as he called them. The slug’s happy nature and exuberant character made him an instant hit with the children. Matatabi had become a hit for playing hide and seek and for taking naps with. Her feline nature made her fickle as the wind, but she would almost always spend some time with her kitten – even if that did mean enduring tiny humans.

Utakata was the only one who hadn’t slipped into a role in their growing village. Too many people and loud noises tired him out after a while. He wasn’t strong like Kisame or approachable like Yahiko. And wherever Yahiko went Nagato and Konan would too. He wasn’t as clever as Kabuto and little children terrified him – they were just so breakable!

For the first few days he helped out where he could but ended up sitting in a tree and watching the
activity when he became more of a hindrance.

Uzu was the one who found him.

“Utakata-kun. Are you alright?”

He jumped down from the tree and slunk over to her side. He had grown and was no longer small enough to pick up. Still, he sought the comfort of Uzu and slid under her arm, leaning into her body.

“I’m just… frustrated Okaa-san. I want to help and be useful but there doesn’t seem to be anything I’m good at. The last time I tried to help I ended up knocking over a container full of nails. It took me nearly an hour to pick them all up.” He pouted and sighed.

Uzu laughed and whilst he was still frustrated, he revelled in her mirth.

“You have other skills. Ones that would probably help me most Utakata-kun.” She offered and led him back towards their home.

He perked up and bounced on the balls of his feet.

“Really Okaa-san? I can help you?”

“Mmhmm. I seem to have become the temporary leader.” Uzu winced. “Seems the elders decided that my memories of how Uzushiogakure used to function are essential and none of them were ever involved in the running of a village. I need to work out which fields we can plant, where we can set livestock to graze, how to establish trade runs with the mainland, how shinobi will find and accept missions, what to do with the belongings of those who will never return and other matters.”

Utakata gulped.

“And how can I help with all that?”

Uzu led him to her room which had been the study where he used to write his poems and create his calligraphy. Now it still held the desk but there was also a folded-up futon tucked in a corner and the stand where Uzu hung her robes when she wasn’t wearing them. She slipped her Mo and outer few layers off, draping them on the stand and pulled some cushions out from under the desk.

Utakata perched on the cushions and watched curiously as Uzu rolled out a large map. It was an old one, preserved through seals and careful storage, of the whole island of Uzushio.

“We’re going to start by marking down the fields which will be best suited to the crops the villagers have brought and deciding the rotation of other fields or grazing areas for the livestock. Some of the animals can be left to graze freely like the sheep and goats, the pigs need a more specific grazing area as I do not particularly wish them to breed with the wild boar.”

Utakata leaned over the map eagerly and learned as Uzu recalled memories of her long-ago children deciding the same such matters. He found the whole process fascinating and rushed to assist when Uzu said that a census of every inhabitant, their family, age, occupation and address would be necessary.

Armed with a clipboard, paper, ink and brush Utakata set out from their home once more. Saiken accompanied him and together they began to go from house to house getting the information. As they went Utakata gained more and more confidence at speaking to people and began to enjoy learning about the newcomers.
It took him the whole morning and most of the afternoon before he finally became too weary. There were only a few he hadn’t managed to speak to. Ones out on boats fishing and those who were busy on construction sites where it wasn’t safe for him to go wandering and asking questions.

“You did really well Uta-kun!” Saiken praised from his perch on Utakata’s shoulder. The boy had long become used to his Bijuu riding on his shoulder and accepted the mucus and slime that accompanied. “Do you feel a bit more comfortable with all the people now?”

“I do. It was nice to meet them and learn about their skills and families. I was a bit worried, as you knew. My, our experiences with large groups of people and villages hasn’t been the best example.” He shivered as he remembered the Hidden Mist Village.

“True. But I don’t think Mother would let anyone be here if they were going to harm someone.” Saiken burbled.

Utakata reached up and rubbed two fingers between Saiken’s eye stalks.

“Thanks, Saiken. I really appreciate it.”

*

When he returned to Uzu’s room, Utakata was shocked to find Uzu lying on her back with her arms spread wide and papers strewn around the room.

“I know now why village leaders are so tired, frustrated and slightly crazy. Paperwork is evil Utakata-kun. Pure evil!” She moaned childishly, reaching up and grabbing his wrist.

He fell down with a yelp and Saiken squealed as he flew down to land on Uzu’s stomach. She rolled onto her side and cuddled the Jinchūriki close, bringing her knees up and curling around him.

“It can’t be that bad?” He mumbled from where his head was tucked into her shoulder.

“It’s torture. Sheer, utter torture.” She muttered.

Utakata winced.

“I suppose you won’t want this request from the builders to fell trees and use the lumber for building then?” He waved the slip in front of her face.

“No! Put it away!” Uzu hissed dramatically. Her eyes widened suddenly as footsteps could be heard heading towards the study. They both knew those steps, Kisame.

“That’s it. I’m playing hooky for the rest of the afternoon. You’re my accomplice Utakata-kun. Saiken, coming or going?” Uzu bolted upright and sprang across the room to the open window that looked out over the garden. She grabbed Utakata around the waist, making him yelp, and tucking him against her side.

Saiken giggled before dematerialising and returning to the seal.

Just as Kisame slid the door to her room open Uzu gave him a cheery wave and jumped out the window. Utakata screamed (in a very manly way of course) as the ground rushed up towards them. Uzu used her energy to cushion her landing before darting through the garden at top speed.

She cackled as Kisame bellowed out the window behind them but didn’t stop running. Utakata squirmed until she slowed long enough to stand him upright and grab his hand, tugging him along
through the streets of the village.

The villagers seemed bemused and amused by Uzu’s antics as she dodged and darted around the busy workers, pulling a resigned and slightly embarrassed Utakata along with her.

*This is fun!* Saiken squealed in Utakata’s mind.

Out of the village they continued and Uzu led them into the wilds of Uzushio, through the acer trees and cherry tree grove, beyond the woods where the deer and boar lived and out towards the northernmost edge of the island.

The land here wasn’t as steep as the eastern cliffs where Utakata and Saiken watched the sunrise and Yahiko went gliding. It was more of a slope that led down to a rocky level that tumbled into the sea. The slope was coated in grasses and bright red and white poppy flowers. Uzu slowed to a walk, panting and wheezing through her grin. Utakata was slightly short of breath too from the sheer speed of their flight from Kisame and the village.

“We haven’t played here much.” Utakata commented when he finally got his breath back. “It’s too open for hide and seek and there are only poppies here, so the wildflower meadows are better for making flower crowns and chains.”

Uzu sank down into the grass, laying back amongst the poppies and tall grasses that were swaying in the ocean breeze that trickled up the slope. Utakata followed her lead and lay perpendicular to her. His breathing settled as he stared up at the blue sky and watched the poppies dance with the grass.

“I read that poppies sometimes grow on battlefields.” Utakata murmured. Uzu listened silently. “They spring up where people have bled into the soil. A great warlord once led his hordes across nations and wherever they slaughtered and soaked the land with blood, white poppies grew.”

Uzu hummed. “There is some truth to that.”

Utakata twisted his head to peer at Uzu out of the corner of his eye. She looked heartbroken.

“Did many die on this slope?” He whispered.

“On this slope, on the beaches, on the clifftops, in the woods, in the village, even on the mountainside.” Uzu murmured. “It would be easier to find the few places where blood wasn’t spilt than to list every place where someone fell.”

Utakata stared back up at the bobbing poppies with a sense of reverence.

“Did you make the poppies grow Okaa-san?”

“No. They grew on their own. Once the siege was over and the enemy retreated with their dead only mine remained. The poppies grew up from the torn landscape here and shrouded the dead until they could be buried.”

“Doesn’t it make you sad?”

“Yes. But the poppies have turned a place that was once a site of death into life again. We are nature,” She rolled onto her side and propped her head up on one hand. Utakata stared up into her eyes. “We are everything of Uzushio. The death of our children whilst unwanted and terrible, was death. After death comes life. It is the natural order of things.”
“Still seems sad.”

“The poppy doesn’t know that it marks a sad place.” Uzu reached out and pulled one down to tickle his cheek. “It grows from seed to sprout to bud to flower. It is simply here and exists. It is up to you whether you admire the poppy for what it is and its growth or condemn it for marking loss of life.”

Utakata didn’t really know what he thought. His brow felt heavy and tight as he frowned. Uzu leaned down and pressed a kiss to his forehead.

The poppy in her hand was enshrouded with her crimson hair. Utakata hadn’t ever considered that Uzumaki red was the same colour as the poppy.

If this slope marked a battlefield soaked in blood, did Uzu’s hair weep for all her lost children?

*

Chapter End Notes

I've just watched Shippuden (from start to end for the third time) and I forgot how dragged out the final battle between Kaguya and Team 7 (+Obito) is.... OMG..... It's like 25 episodes of back story and fillers with only two episodes of actual battling.... (I'm exaggerating but at the same time I'm really not). And then we get Sasuke's bs.... I will probably avoid bringing Kaguya into this because she was such a let down of a final boss enemy. Madara was so much better....

Anyway......
Next Chapter - Yugito Part Six: It's Yugito's birthday. Matatabi has a super awesome present for her. She falls in love.
Yugito - Part Six

Chapter Summary

Yugito Part Six: It's Yugito's birthday. Matatabi has a super awesome present for her. She falls in love.

Chapter Notes

Hello all!
So, this has become a series of sorts. You have not one but two additional side stories/chapters to read as well as the main storyline. 'Age with Grace' is Shizune's POV of meeting Uzu and some of the events that followed immediately after. 'Glory' is three alternate perspectives of the Fall of Uzushiogakure. Please check them out and let me know what you think!

Onward to the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yugito

(Part Six)

*

On her eighth birthday, Yugito fell in love.

She had asked to go to the mainland for her birthday. Matatabi had said that she was old enough to seek a summoning contract with the cats and Uzu-nee had agreed. She decided she wanted to try and sign the contract on her birthday, as a present from Matatabi, so Uzu-nee, Kisame and she set off.

Utakata, Kabuto and Shizune had agreed to stay with Tsunade on the island and help the new citizens begin the rebuild. Although Yugito didn’t think Kabuto-kun would be much help. He was really smart, but he wasn’t that strong. And Tsunade-ba-chan kept stealing him and teaching him about medical jutsu.

She had really gone off fish recently. Kabuto just kept healing them and then they had to eat them because the fish Tsunade-ba-chan kept using weren’t indigenous (that was her new favourite word to use) to Uzushio and might eat the koi.

Matatabi had led the way across Fire, giving Konoha a wide berth, and heading for the border of the Land of Rice Fields. She had told them all about the abandoned city where there lived a lady called Nekobaa and some of the Ninneko.

Yugito got steadily more and more excited the closer they got to their destination. Even Kisame
was being kinder than usual as he could tell just how excited she truly was. Uzu-nee sighed exasperatedly whenever Yugito was too hyper to go to sleep but would gently brush and stroke her hair until the girl fell asleep.

*

The weather was miserable the day of her birthday. The heavens opened and rain absolutely poured down. Even the deluge couldn’t dampen Yugito’s spirits. Matatabi finally led them into the abandoned city mid-morning and Yugito chattered excitedly to Uzu-nee and Kisame.

She could smell lots and lots of cats in this city and there were very few signs of human habitation.

“Here we are.” Matatabi announced and led them into a dark entranceway. They were grateful to get out of the rain and Yugito shook off the droplets from her cloak eagerly. Matatabi waited for them, her smaller form lighting up the tunnel that lay in front of them.

“Are you sure we’re in the right place?” Uzu-nee asked. Matatabi nodded and Yugito agreed.

“I can smell lots of cats Uzu-nee!” She chirped and followed Matatabi.

The tunnel seemed to go on forever. Yugito fiddled with a strand of hair that had fallen out the crown Uzu-nee had made for her that morning. She had used lots of origami flower pins and Yugito knew that it looked like she had a crown of blue, purple and white flowers. Matatabi had said she looked very cute and made an approving noise.

“Well, well. Look who it is,” A voice purred from the dark. Matatabi flicked her two tails and continued walking on down the tunnel.

“I didn’t think we would ever be graced with the great Two-Tails presence, nya.” Another voice replied.

“Ugh, cats.” Kisame muttered and crossed his arms.

“Hmm, they’ve brought talking sushi for us.” A Ninneko slunk out of the dark and licked his lips at Kisame. The boy bared his sharp teeth and snapped at the cat. The cat gave him a bored look before trotting to the front of their procession, sparing Uzu-nee and Yugito an intrigued look.

“How nice to meet you Nibi-sama.” The cat purred and paced alongside Matatabi. “What brings you to us nya?”

A cat fell from a pipe above them and landed on Yugito’s shoulder. She jumped slightly but relaxed when she realised it was only a cat. The feline sniffed at her hair and licked her cheek.

“Mmrow. This one smells and tastes like Nibi-sama. I think this one is the Jinchuriki, Denka.” The cat on her shoulder purred and rubbed her cheek and whiskers along Yugito’s face.

The cat trotting next to Matatabi glanced back and then at Matatabi who was doing a splendid job at ignoring them.

“Hmm, that would explain a lot Hina. Like why Nibi-sama is so small, it’s only part of her chakra, the rest of it is still in the little girl.”

“She smells nice, I like her.” Hina purred from her place on Yugito’s shoulder.

“Nya, we’ll see what Nekobaa thinks. But she’ll probably like the kitten too.” Denka shrugged his
shoulders and ran ahead of them towards the growing light.

Hina twisted around to peer back at Uzu-nee.

“You don’t smell like a human. You smell like nature.” Hina accused.

“That’s because I’m not human.” Uzu-nee replied.

“Mmrow. A Jinchūriki, a fish boy and a nature thing. What an interesting day.”

Kisame muttered under his breath and Yugito held in a giggle. It wasn’t only her and Matatabi who thought he smelt like fish.

* 

“How exciting.” Nekobaa said and she looked Yugito up and down, measuring her with a tape measure, getting her to hold out her arms, open her mouth and inspecting the claws on her fingers. The old woman looked at Matatabi too, who had taken up position in the middle of the room and was being swarmed by cats of all shapes and sizes.

Yugito thought Matatabi looked very queenly as she sat on her haunches and peered over the sea of cats.

“I never thought I’d have the Nibi in my shop.” Nekobaa wrote down her measurements in a small book. “And her Jinchuriki no less. Thank you for letting me take some measurements. It’s a personal interest of mine.”

Yugito smiled.

“Now, you were after the cat summoning contract, correct?” Nekobaa, flung some scrolls across the room and several of the cats who had been swarming Matatabi screeched at the sudden noise and scurried.

Matatabi used the opportunity to elegantly walk over to Yugito and the girl crouched down so that Matatabi could leap up and lie regally around her neck. The other cats mewedled in protest and Matatabi stared down at them with vague amusement.

“Ah-ha!” Nekobaa crowed and held up a slightly more ornate scroll. “Here we go, one cat summoning contract. Now, how much shall I charge you?”

Matatabi flicked her tail tips slightly.

“I do hope you aren’t going to insist that the Jinchuriki of the Two Tails pays for the cat summoning contract?” The Nibi’s voice was like cold fire and Nekobaa shivered before laughing.

“Of course not, it’s on the house for you.” She reluctantly handed the scroll over and Yugito bowed politely to thank her.

“Now kitten, you need to open it up, yes that’s it, and then cut your forefinger and sign your name in the box.” Yugito followed Matatabi’s instructions, using her best handwriting to sign her name.

“Next, cover all your fingertips and thumb with blood and put your prints underneath your name. Excellent!”

“What now, Matatabi?” Yugito rubbed her fingers gratefully under Matatabi’s chin. She grinned up at Uzu-nee and Kisame who were sitting on a sofa, drinking milk and eating fish-shaped bean buns.
“Now you attempt a summons.” The Nibi walked her through the steps and everyone watched eagerly as Yugito performed the summoning jutsu.

As the smoke vanished Yugito let out a squeal of delight at the tiny, skinny, black kitten with almost obscenely large ears yawned and stared at her with bored green eyes.

“What do you want kid?” The cat drawled.

“Umm, my name’s Yugito and I just signed the summoning contract with the cats. You’re my first summons.” She explained. “What’s your name?”

“Huh, been a long time since anyone signed our contract. I’m Jiji. Now, I wish I could be excited that you summoned me, but I’d rather not do anything if it’s all the same to you.” The kitten ran off towards the tunnel and Yugito gasped and charged after him.

“Wait! Come back!” She shouted but then paused still as a boy appeared from out of the dark, Jiji in his hand, spitting and wriggling.

*

Yugito felt her eyes widen as she looked at the boy. He held out the squirming kitten to her.

“Is this yours?” He asked.

Yugito nodded and quietly reached out and took the now sulking Jiji from him. He smiled gently as Yugito clutched the kitten to her chest.

“Thank you.” Yugito whispered.

The boy shrugged his shoulders.

“My summons can be mischievous too. I know what it is like.”

Yugito watched as he walked over to greet Nekobaa. Matatabi had disappeared back inside Yugito when the boy appeared.

*Kitten, do you think that boy is cute?* She asked incredulously.

Yugito furiously shook her head. Matatabi laughed long and loud.

“Well done Yugito-chan.” Uzu-nee praised her and handed her the cat summoning contract she had scooped up off the floor.

“Yeah, well done brat. Happy Birthday.” Kisame handed her a miniature headband, one that held the kanji for her name on the metal plate. Yugito smiled delightedly and took it from him, squeezing his hand gratefully.

She looked down at the kitten who was resignedly curled up in her arms.

“Would you really mind being my summons Jiji-san?”

The kitten sighed.

“I suppose it would be more interesting than staying in the castle all the time and obeying Nekomata… Fine, give me the headband. And drop the ‘san’. If we’re going to be risking nine lives together you can call me Jiji.”
Yugito bit her lip and fastened the headband around Jiji’s neck as he directed her. It hung fairly loose on the small black kitten, but he assured her that he still had a bit of growing to do.

Nekobaa came up to their group and admired the headband.

“Nicely done Yugito-san. Congratulations. After a while you should be able to summon more ninneko. You may have to persuade some of them to work with you, bribery often works, but for the most part they’ll be happy with some good quality fish and catnip.”

Yugito grinned and Jiji purred from her shoulder.

“We do love catnip.”

“Itachi-kun, meet Yugito-san. She’s just signed the contract with the cats.”

The boy had joined Nekobaa and smiled at Yugito, congratulating her. Yugito felt a wave of heat on her cheeks and she squeezed Jiji tightly.

“Are you from Konoha?” Itachi asked and Yugito shook her head. “Oh, well, hopefully we will meet again one day. Goodbye for now Nekobaa, Yugito-san.”

The boy bowed and left, having got whatever it was he came for. Yugito had noticed the hitai-ate on his forehead and the sword on his back.

*Wow.* She murmured to Matatabi.

The Nibi roared with laughter.

*I don’t know which you’re more excited about; the fact you have summons or that boy you think is cute!*

Kisame had been watching the whole time and he leaned down to peer at Yugito’s red face.

“Is this the first stages of true love?” He teased. Yugito yelped and swatted at his face but he dodged her claws.

“Uzu-nee!” Yugito yowled. “Make him stop!”

“You do seem a bit excited Yugito-chan.” Uzu joined in. “Maybe Kisame is telling the truth.”

Yugito decided that retreat was the best option and she ran back along the tunnel and out into the rain.

Just as she burst out onto the abandoned street, Itachi turned from where he had been speaking to a crow on his arm. The bird burst into flight, raindrops flicking off his wingtips.

Yugito watched in amazement as Itachi gave a small wave before disappearing in a flock of crows.

“He was really cool.” She murmured.

Jiji sighed. It was just his luck that his mistress fell in love on the same day he was summoned.

Now he’d never hear the end of Itachi.

He had no idea how true his words were.
Jiji is a little nod to Studio Ghibli’s Kiki’s Delivery Service. I love that sassy cat so I couldn’t help but bring him in here! Fun fact: I wrote this chapter weeks ago and have been writing to catch up to it!

Next Chapter - Itachi Part One: Itachi is a genin in (mild) distress. Yugito brings out the clowder. Mama Uzu bestows a nickname.
Itachi - Part One

Chapter Summary

Itachi Part One: Itachi is a genin in (mild) distress. Yugito brings out the clowder. Mama Uzu bestows a nickname.

Chapter Notes

As always you guys are the bees knees! Thanks for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Itachi

(Part One)

* He dodged a paper bomb and landed at the base of a tree. His face stung from a hundred tiny cuts from previous explosions. He allowed himself a second to gather his strength before launching himself out of the undergrowth and back into the sight of his pursuers.

He didn’t understand what had gone wrong. The mission had been planned to a detail. They had been delivering a scroll to representatives from Iwa at a neutral meeting place. But they hadn’t even made it to the location before being attacked.

His eyes had caught the attackers just before they made contact, but he could not cast a genjutsu on them, their eyes were concealed, hidden behind masks and glasses. His two genin teammates and his jounin sensei were dead. They had been trying to flee, return to Konoha and report to the Hokage. But their mission had been beyond the borders of Fire and it was at least two days travel from the village. Itachi didn’t think he would make it.

From what he could see, his enemy appeared to be Iwa shinobi. But a force this large shouldn’t have, couldn’t have slipped past the border patrol. Unless the border patrol had been removed and no one had raised the alarm.

But that was unlikely. Tensions were already running high in Konoha. There were whispers of war and sharp words being directed towards Sakumo Hatake, the White Fang. His mission over a year ago, had been a failure and begun the avalanche towards war – if one listened to all the rumours and believed them.

Itachi flung shuriken back behind him and heard them impact with a few of his attackers.

He was getting tired. He had to make a choice. Stand and fight, hoping he could win against the overwhelming numbers or carry on fleeing and hope he bumped into another Konoha team near the
His eyes caught the rise of the ground in front of him just in time and he sprang backwards from the crashing earth that had crumbled where he had been about to step.

Seems his pursuers were fed up of playing hunter.

He drew his sword.

“You have run out of patience it seems. Very well then. I will not make it easy for you.” He said, keeping his voice measured.

He was encircled and sank lower ready to pounce. His eyes flickered around taking in everything, getting as much information about the terrain, his attackers, their chakra network and their movements as he could.

He breathed out slowly and then took another calming breath inwards.

Blue and black flames suddenly encircled him and forced his attackers back.

“Leave him alone!” A voice yowled from the treetops.

Itachi spun and looked upwards only to see a girl dropping from the trees and landing at his side. She straightened up and Itachi frowned. Last time they had met she had, had two blue eyes. Now she was glaring from a piercing green and a coldly yellow eye. Itachi looked around for her companions but there was no sign of them.

“You shouldn’t be here.” He said. His pursuers had been momentarily deterred by her arrival and the blue and black flames that were still burning around them. “Now they will try to kill you too.”

“They’ll have to catch us first.” A different voice purred from the girl. Older, calmer – amused.

The girl, Yugito he recalled her name, grabbed hold of his free hand and pulled. Surprised he went willingly with her as she pulled him up into the treetops and began to lead him on a twisting and complicated route.

He could still hear his pursuers behind them, no longer phased by Yugito’s arrival.

“You should let me go. I am their primary target. It is likely they would not pursue you for long nor would they wish to overly divide their forces.” He reasoned with her.

“Shut up and run!” Yugito spat. “And do you always talk like such a grown up?”

Itachi blinked. No one had ever commented on the way he spoke before. He wriggled his fingers trying to pull his hand from Yugito’s but she tightened her grip and pulled him closer so that he was running alongside her.

She bit her thumb and slapped her shoulder calling out the Summoning Jutsu as she ran. The cat from their previous meeting landed on her shoulder in a lounging position and yawned.

“What do you want mistress? I was in the middle of a nap.” Jiji drawled and went limp over her shoulder.

“Enemy shinobi pursuing us. Can you summon the clowder and play distraction while I get back to camp?”
Jiji yawned again and flicked his ear.

“What’s in it for us?”

“Five fish and a ball of catnip – ”

Jiji opened his mouth and began to protest.

“Each.” Yugito finished with a smirk. Jiji’s tail flicked with pleasure.

“Deal Mistress.” He purred before sitting up on her shoulder, wiping his paw in her blood and then performing the summoning.

Cats suddenly appeared on the branch where they had been and Itachi glanced back to see a variety of breeds and sizes launching themselves at his pursuers. Startled human yelps filled the forest and Yugito giggled.

Itachi looked at her confused. Why was she laughing?

“Come on Itachi-kun. This way.” She indicated down to the ground and Itachi echoed her movements, landing in a crouch and moving in unison with her. She was surprisingly open about her movements, telegraphing each step to him and he could easily read her intentions.

Yugito led him into a large hollowed out tree and they were forced to go onto their hands and knees to crawl into its depths.

“What – ” Itachi began to speak but Yugito’s hand clapped over his mouth. Her skin was soft and he could smell the scent of wildflowers.

The pursuing shinobi rushed by the open hollow of the tree, seemingly oblivious to their hiding place. A couple of cats were chasing after them and Yugito smothered a giggle with her free hand. They waited a while, listening intently for any sign of his pursuers returning.

Jiji sloped into the opening of the log and yawned loudly.

“Your fish brother met up with your enemies. They fled him when he drained several of them of chakra and caused a tidal wave to appear.” The black cat drawled. “The rest were forced to flee when the clowder attacked. And before you ask Mistress, we didn’t kill them. Some vicious and vindictive maiming, but no deaths.”

“Excellent work Jiji!” Yugito crowed and crawled past Itachi to the opening. She scooped up the small black cat and he lounged on her forearm. Itachi pulled his weary and shaking body out from the log but stayed crouched to watch as Yugito rubbed nimble fingers over the cat’s head and elicited a hushed rumbling purr.

Itachi took the moment to take inventory of himself. He was down to his last few shuriken, one kunai, his tanto and a reduced amount of chakra. He also had several unpleasant cuts on his arms and one on his cheek. He pulled bandages out and began to bind his arms but was stopped by Yugito.

“If you wait a minute Uzu-nee will give you some salve and wrap you up properly.”

“Thank you, but that is not necessary.” Itachi said.

Jiji’s tail flicked and he opened his eyes to peer at Itachi. The Nineko’s piercing stare was rather
discomfiting.

“Still, you’ll heal better with salve.” Yugito protested.

“Who’ll heal better with salve?” Kisame burst out from the trees and skidded to a halt next to Yugito. He checked her over, grabbing her shoulders and running his eyes over her body.

“I’m fine. It’s Itachi-kun that’s injured.” Yugito protested and shrugged Kisame off. The blue man pivoted on one foot and took in Itachi’s appearance.

“Sage dammit!” He snarled. “What are the odds that this one doesn’t get adopted?”

“Pretty slim according to Matatabi. She reckons it’s 90-10 odds in favour of adoption.” Yugito seemed to frown.

Kisame chuckled and nudged her gently. Jiji yowled in protest at being disturbed and swiped at Kisame.

“Chin up brat. Uzu’s adoption doesn’t mean you can’t still fa–”

He was interrupted as Yugito spun and slammed her fist into his stomach. Her blow did nothing but Kisame growled and lunged at her. She hissed and dodged him, Jiji flinging through the air to land on the man’s head and sinking claws into his scalp. Kisame snarled viciously and reached up to grab at the cat summons but froze at a disapproving tut from Uzu who had arrived.

Jiji leapt back onto Yugito’s shoulder and draped himself over it, sniffing disdainfully at Kisame who was rubbing at the tender spots where the cat had clawed him.

“What did you do now?” Uzu said. “Or do I not want to know?”

“You don’t want to know Uzu-nee.” Yugito chirped. “It was all a misunderstanding. Right Kisame?”

The man muttered under his breath and glared at the young girl slightly but nodded in agreement.

“Uzu-nee, Itachi-kun is wounded. I said you probably had a salve to help him.” Yugito trotted over and pulled the woman to where Itachi was still crouched.

“I see. Nice to see you again Itachi-kun. I hope Yugito-chan was able to assist you?”

Uzu sank down and pulled a salve from her robes. Itachi watched as she also pulled a water flask and rags from her sleeve too. The cloth hadn’t moved before as if weighted down with such items. He suspected a storage scroll.

“Yugito-san was very helpful. I do not think I could have escaped without her aid.”

Yugito flushed and spun to look towards the clowder of cats that were slinking through the trees and congregating at her feet.

“That is good to hear Itachi-kun. I’m sure Yugito wouldn’t mind if you were less formal, right Kitten?” Uzu commented as she tended to Itachi’s cuts. The young girl shook her head and smiled shyly.

“Yugito-chan is fine Itachi-kun. We must be nearly the same age. You don’t mind me calling you Itachi-kun do you?” She suddenly seemed worried.
Itachi shook his head and winced as Uzu cleaned the wound on his cheek. It seemed the kunai had cut deeper than he thought.

“Just need to apply the salve little crow.” Uzu murmured and dabbed the healing balm on his cheek.

Kisame groaned and crouched down on his hocks. His head drooped and he stared at the floor.

“She’s done it. She’s given him a nickname. Sage dammit! I’m gonna owe Konan money now.” He mumbled.

Yugito giggled and glanced at Itachi before blushing and returning her attention to the clowder swarming around her ankles and legs.

“Should I be concerned?” Itachi asked Uzu. The woman smiled at him.

“No. Kisame is being overly dramatic little crow. No need to worry.”

“He mentioned adoption. I already have parents.”

Kisame brightened. “So that means he doesn’t need adopting! Great, fix him up and then we can be on our way!”

Uzu raised an eyebrow and Kisame scowled.

“No. No more brats. Yugito’s more than enough and you have five others. And the old bat. You don’t need anymore.”

“You make it sound like they’re shoes.” Yugito commented. “and you didn’t mention Shizune-nee. Is it ‘cause you like her? You think she’s gorgeous, you want to kiss her?”

She sing-songed and giggled. Kisame flushed and they began a game of chase which the clowder enthusiastically joined in.

“I am afraid I do not understand.” Itachi watched bewildered at the pair’s antics. “Is this normal behaviour between siblings?”

Uzu winced and bit her lower lip. A strange noise came from her, a sort of indecisive whine.

“Normal is overrated. Kisame and Yugito have a healthy sibling relationship. This is how they show affection.”

Itachi watched.

“How bizarre... If I ever have a sibling should I act like that?”

* 

Chapter End Notes

If Uzu gives you a nickname that means automatic adoption. Even if you don’t
actually need adopting (but we all know Itachi really does).
A clowder is the collective for multiple cats.
I also heard Sandra Bullock in Miss Congeniality when Yugito is teasing Kisame about Shizune… "You think I'm gorgeous, you wanna hug me, you wanna kiss me!"

Next Chapter - Itachi Part Two:
War has broken out. Itachi is trained for it, but it makes him sick. He meets the Nibi and questions what a shinobi is.
Itachi - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Itachi Part Two:
War has broken out. Itachi is trained for it, but it makes him sick. He meets the Nibi and questions what a shinobi is.

Chapter Notes

ITAV is 30 days old today! I'm so honoured by how many of you are reading and liking this story. I hope to keep publishing frequently and seeing where the characters and story take us.

In honour of 30 days of chapters I'm giving you two chapters. Here is Itachi Part Two and Part Three will be posted directly after!

Itachi

(Part Two)

*

War is not a place for children. It is not a place for anyone. It was tearing him apart. Kill or be killed. Fight, run, hide, attack, run, dodge, hide, rest, attack, dodge, run, hide… On and on and on it went. A repetition of missions and targets and successes and failures.

He tried to harden himself to it, but some of the things he had seen were horrifying and with the Sharingan they played out in his dreams on repeat. A continuous circuit of gruesome deaths, bodies discarded on battlefields like broken toys, blood drenched mud sucking in living men and making them stumble onto an enemy’s blade.

He felt drenched in filth and blood and gore and death. It wasn’t clean. And in his innermost thoughts, Itachi didn’t think it was noble either.

*

Itachi knew he was a skilled shinobi. A ‘genius’ like Kakashi Hatake and his once beloved father. He had been made chunin at the outset of the war and quickly earned a field promotion to jounin when his commanding officers had all been killed and he had stepped up to lead the remaining chunin and jounin who had been in disarray.

The rank didn’t matter, however. He still slept in dark hollows filled with rainwater. He still ate hard tack and food pills. He still wept each night whilst on watch, weeping for the destruction and devastation surrounding him. He still woke, like so many other shinobi, abruptly and clutching a kunai startled by the slightest change in air flow, the softest noise, even the change in someone
else’s heartbeat.

* 

Itachi was running to his next mission when he felt a surge of familiar chakra. He skidded to a halt and peered through the rain. In the distance there was a burning inferno, raging with black and blue flames.

He glanced in the direction of his mission and then back to the flames that had saved him once. He owed Yugito. His mission could wait a few minutes.

He twisted and felt resolution and energy fill him.

As he ran he recalled rumours of a group that had been spotted travelling through the nations but leaving no body count. He had wondered at the time, if the red head leading them could be Uzu and if Yugito was with her.

It seemed his suspicions were confirmed.

The ground quaked suddenly and Itachi leapt up into the air to avoid the shifting earth that shattered beneath his feet.

His jaw dropped as a massive blue-black flaming cat with two tails roared at the shinobi who had tried to capture it by splitting the earth.

“‘The Nibi.’” Itachi murmured and landed at a distance to observe. His Sharingan darted over the fight and he was shocked to see Yugito’s chakra entwined and surrounded by the Nibi’s. He wouldn’t have guessed that the little girl he had met was a Jinchūriki but that seemed to be the only logical explanation.

The Nibi roared again and swiped a paw at the attacking shinobi. Itachi was torn. He owed Yugito, she had helped him previously on one of his few failed missions, potentially saving his life. But she was the Nibi and yet she did not seem to be allied to any nation. Would the Nibi even accept help? From Konoha’s history the Bijuu were difficult to control, it was why they had never used the Ninetails in the First or Second Shinobi Wars. There were no guarantees that the Ninetails wouldn’t turn its ire on the villagers it was being charged with protecting.

The Nibi backed away as chains enhanced with chakra were being thrown towards it. There was a plaintive sound to the cry that came from it. Fear and anger mixed together.

Itachi leapt forward and landed on the Nibi, knocking away the chains and severing those that had managed to encircle the Bijuu. The shinobi below began to shout to each other and Itachi slid down the Nibi’s shoulder and began to capture shinobi in a genjutsu.

The Nibi seemed to understand his actions and fiery cat paws burst from its body and grasped the shinobi, holding them still for him to use his Sharingan. It was an effective method and soon the large group were all motionless, trapped.

Itachi slid his tanto back into its sheath and turned to look at the Nibi. Its eyes were familiar one yellow, one green and they narrowed slightly to look at Itachi.

“‘Little Crow. Thank you for your aid. Kitten and I were having a tough time not killing them.’” The Nibi rumbled.

“You can speak…” Itachi said and breathed in and out slowly. “I have never heard of the Bijuu
being able to speak.”

“We might look like giant animals but we’re more than that. Summons speak do they not? We are greater than summons. Do not think we are just mindless chakra monsters.” The Nibi’s tails flicked in annoyance and Itachi winced.

“My apologies, Nibi-sama.” Itachi sketched a small bow. “It was not intended as an insult, it was a comment from ignorance.”

“Mmm, I suppose you wouldn’t know Little Crow. Kitten seems to believe you at any rate.”

The Nibi lay down on her front and extended a paw to pat Itachi gently on the top of his head. It took all his will not to move as that large paw hovered over him before sinking down to pet him as if he were a kitten himself.

“Is Yugito-chan well?” He endured the petting.

“She is. She will return momentarily. I wished to converse with you myself and measure your character. You are an honourable shinobi Itachi-kun.” The Nibi purred and removed her paw. “You may call me Matatabi. Yugito-chan will be weakened when I dematerialise. It takes a lot of energy to meld our chakra and her pathways are still young, not yet strong enough to handle massive amounts of my chakra for an extended period. Please don’t let her collapse here. It would not be good for either of us.”

Itachi watched in awe as Matatabi seemed to shrink and become a swirling mass of blue and black flames that spiralled down until they were in a human shape before vanishing completely.

Yugito staggered on her feet and Itachi saw her knees fold. He transported across the distance between them and caught her.

She had grown in the year or so since they had last met. Her head fell against his shoulder and he bent, scooping her knees up and lifting her up against his torso.

She stared up at him.

“Thanks for the save Itachi-kun.” She smiled weakly and closed her eyes. “Matatabi and I are grateful.”

Itachi said nothing but turned and retreated from the ruined area. Yugito nestled against him, her body sinking into his arms and her head resting against his shoulder. It was a strange sensation to have someone trust him so completely that they relaxed in his presence. He couldn’t remember when the last time he had held someone this close without killing them or been held for that fact.

He couldn’t even recall his mother embracing him this trustingly when he was last home after a mission a couple of months ago.

It was not an unpleasant sensation.

* 

Itachi found a safe cave to hide Yugito in. The girl was still asleep when he laid her down on the bare ground whilst he unsealed a bedroll and didn’t wake when he transferred her to the softer surface. He stared at her.

If she was that out of it would it be safe to leave her here alone? Whilst he thought this cave would
be safe and he couldn’t sense or see signs of anyone nearby there were never any guarantees this close to the front.

He bit his thumb and summoned a crow to watch over her. The bird hopped up onto a low tree branch outside the cave and agreed to keep watch. Itachi stroked back the loose hair from Yugito’s face. Her face was sticky with sweat and she looked pale.

“She will be well after some rest. Do not worry Little Crow.”

Itachi sprang into movement, a kunai flicking into his hand and his body braced over Yugito’s torso and head. His Sharingan whirled and his eyes widened in surprise at the miniature Bijuu that was sat primly on the opposite side of the girl.

“Shouldn’t you be inside Yugito-chan?” Itachi asked. There was a hint of exasperation in his voice. So far his first encounter with a Bijuu was a mess of contradictions to what he had been told. Matatabi did not seem like a mindless beast or full of hatred and anger like the Ninetails was supposed to be. In fact, the Nibi seemed far more sensible and practical than some veteran shinobi he knew.

“I’m supposed to be wandering the world and living my life.” Matatabi sneered. “Humans put us inside other humans because they were afraid of us. And they wanted to use our power. Senju sold us off and we became commodities.”

Itachi kept his face still and calm against her irritation. Her two tails flicked aggressively. He pushed up from where he had been covering Yugito, satisfied that Matatabi was who she appeared to be.

“There have been changes to my living circumstances. I may now manifest outside of Yugito-chan’s body without having to take over her body or merging our chakra. I manifested so I could assist your bird summons in guarding my Kitten.”

Itachi nodded.

“Thank you. I was – concerned for her safety. My mission should not take long and I will return as soon as I am able.”

Matatabi yawned widely and laid down next to Yugito, pressing up against the girl’s arm. Yugito murmured unintelligibly in her sleep and rolled onto her side, flinging her arm over the Bijuu’s back. Matatabi rumbled in her chest and Yugito nuzzled into her flaming side and relaxed.

It seemed a familiar occurrence and Itachi let out a small sigh. He knew that Matatabi would protect her unconscious Jinchūriki. He sketched a small bow before teleporting out of the cave and heading towards his rendezvous point for his mission.

He found himself looking forward to returning and speaking with Yugito and Matatabi. He wanted to know more about Jinchūriki and Bijuu. Especially as Matatabi, whilst unimpressed with Hashirama Senju, seemed to care for Yugito deeply.

Questions were racing through Itachi’s head. Were all Bijuu like Matatabi? Could they manifest beyond their Jinchūriki without overwhelming their body? Could they all speak? Were they all friendly? What did Matatabi think of shinobi and the villages? Did she hate them all for imprisoning her?

Itachi forced his questions into a compartment in his mind. He pushed his curiosity, concern and wonder away. He had a mission to complete. He needed to protect his comrades and village. He
was a shinobi. He would do what was necessary and then wipe the blood off before returning to Yugito and Matatabi.

He was a shinobi of Konoha, although at the back of his mind, in his deepest and quietest thoughts, he wondered if shinobi was a good thing if it took an intelligent, thinking, independent creature and trapped it in a cage to use it as a weapon. But, then again, shinobi were weapons.

That thought made his teeth ache.

What is a shinobi?

*
Itachi - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Itachi returns to Yugito and gets fed (by Kisame). He and Uzu have a conversation.

Chapter Notes

Double update because of ITAV’s 1 month birthday! Make sure you read Itachi Part Two first!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Itachi

(Part Three)

* 

Itachi wiped off the blood staining his hands and arms in a stream near the cave where Yugito was hidden. He had completed his mission. The team he had been assigned to assist had walked away with very few injuries. Their target had been annihilated.

He had thrown up when he was several miles away and no one could see him. Bile dripped from his mouth and fell in globs onto the ground. His throat burned. His eyes ached. His soul felt black and heavy.

“Gods.” He murmured as the small stream turned pink with the blood. He was so tired. Tired of fighting and killing and fighting and killing. It was an endless cycle. Over and over and over and over. It was all such a pointless waste of life.

He licked his lips tasting the acid of his bile still coating his lips.

Older shinobi said that it got easier. But he didn’t know if he wanted it to. If living with the fact that he was a killer became easy, would he still be human? Those who said that they had become used to killing were shinobi he avoided. They were dark, twisted, cold or ruthlessly mocking.

Killing itself was easy. He was trained to do it. His body and mind knew how to extinguish life. Living with it afterwards was the hardest part.

Itachi pushed himself onto his feet and ran towards the cave. He was to return to Konoha to receive his next assignment. But first he wanted to check on Yugito and Matatabi. His crow hadn’t found him so he assumed all was well. There was a part of him that worried even so.

* 

He needn’t have worried. Crouched in the tree next to his crow, Itachi could see that Uzu had found Yugito and was caring for her.
The girl was leaning against Kisame, his arm wrapped around her as she listened to the others chattering. There were new additions to their group. Children, younger than Yugito.

Itachi sighed softly, pleased that no harm had befallen Yugito or Matatabi. Now didn’t seem to be the right time to try and inquire about how a Jinchūriki, a young Jinchūriki for that fact, seemed to be wandering around the nations and not belonging to any of them in an obvious way. He knew that if Konoha lost their Jinchūriki (which wouldn’t happen because Kushina-san was loyal to Konoha) there would be a mass search and rumours floating around that would have made it to the other nations.

“Thank you for watching over her until I returned.” Itachi gave his crow summons a dried raisin from a small packet of fruit saved for such occasions. The bird gulped it down before dismissing itself.

He adjusted his tanto and nibbled on a couple of pieces of fruit himself before turning to head back to Konoha.

Suddenly, there was movement and Yugito was on the branch next to him, her face startlingly close to his. His Sharingan spun and he blinked.

“Itachi-kun. Were you going to sneak off?” Yugito pouted. Why was she pouting?

“You are with your guardians. There is no further need for me to remain.” He said.

Yugito sighed and rolled her eyes in a manner that only a young girl could do. Itachi didn’t know it was possible for someone to be that dramatic. She reached out, grabbed his wrist, and flung him through the air.

He didn’t anticipate it. Yugito’s small stature and thin frame belied a strength and cunning that could shift a trained shinobi who was taller and more experienced than she. He landed on his feet with his hands braced against the ground in a very feline pose.

Uzu was staring at him and he hastily stood up, brushing his hands together to get the dirt off them. He bowed to the woman who had her lips pressed tightly together.

“Uzu-sama. It is nice to see you again. And you Kisame-san.”

“Just Kisame kid, you’re gonna make me break out in hives with all that polite talk.” Kisame groaned.

“I am happy to see you as well Little Crow.” Uzu swept forward and embraced Itachi.

His body went stiff and he leaned back and away from Uzu. His eyes darted around to see Yugito and Kisame wincing. Why was she hugging him? People didn’t hug him. His own mother didn’t hug him. Not since he was much younger anyway. Now she showed affection in shoulder pats and brief caresses of his hair. Hugs were not something people gave him.

“Ummm Uzu-sama?” His voice went startlingly high.


He grunted but remained stiff in her embrace. When she eventually pulled back Itachi resisted the urge to flee. So much affection in one moment (although, in the back of his mind, he acknowledged that he had rather enjoyed the embrace).
“You must eat with us before you return.” Uzu indicated for him to join them in the cave and he accepted. Who knew what else Uzu would do if he refused?

He sat himself down and accepted his rolled up bedroll from one of the youngsters. They seemed quite content with his presence and were far more interested in the food Kisame was serving up. Bowls of egg rice with peas, carrots and other vegetables and a side of meat strips, smoked and dried for preservation.

It had been a while since he ate so well.

He tuck into the food and watched from beneath his lashes as the others did the same. Yugito was nestled up against Uzu. Completely relaxed between the woman’s legs, her back supported by the woman’s front.

It looked nice, seeing someone comfortable and safe in an embrace. He could see that most of the group were happily leaning against or nudging someone. Fleeting touches that were unthought of, unreserved and wholly given.

Yugito laughed at something Kisame said and Itachi watched as Uzu smiled and pressed a kiss to the top of her head. Yugito seemed to glow at the contact.

* 

After they had eaten Itachi found Yugito plonking herself next to him and Matatabi materialising draped over her shoulders.

He spent a good hour conversing with the pair. Learning that Uzu had rescued Yugito from her village, that Yugito had been treated like a weapon since Matatabi was sealed inside her, that until Uzu found her she hadn’t felt a kind touch in years, that everyone in her village had been afraid of her, that Uzu and her siblings loved her and weren’t afraid of her.

It was enlightening. It made Itachi wonder if Kushina-san had experienced the same thing – if she still did. Matatabi’s opinion of villages made Itachi think about the purpose of the village. If they would sacrifice children to store and use Bijuu, what else would a village do to maintain strength? How far would a village go to be strong? It made his stomach churn.

Eventually he was forced to begin making his farewells. He would be expected back in Konoha within the next few days and even minor delays could be interpreted as suspicious.

Yugito blushed when she said goodbye. Itachi didn’t know why but shook his head as she turned to snarl at Kisame who muttered unintelligibly.

“Itachi-kun. I will walk with you for a while if you don’t mind?” Uzu asked but it was a statement rather than a question.

They left the cave with Kisame and Yugito wrestling and the other children cheering them on.

“Why did you help Yugito-chan? It was probably surprising, finding a Bijuu in the middle of the war yet not hearing any prior rumours of one.” Uzu said out of the blue.

“I recognised Matatabi’s fire. She and Yugito helped me a while ago. I wanted to honour their help with my own.”

Uzu hummed and strolled along with her hands tucked into her voluminous sleeves.
“I see. She helped you, you helped her.”

He nodded and stayed silent.

“And that was the only reason?”

He slowed to a stop. It wasn’t the only reason. But…

“Matatabi seemed – afraid. I was afraid, she is a Tailed Beast and all the knowledge I have ever studied or heard implied that Tailed Beasts hated humans and would attack ruthlessly. However, when she was fighting, she was not aiming to kill, merely to incapacitate. When the chains were being thrown at her I could see that she was afraid. If the Tailed Beasts hate humans, why would fear be present and not hate?”

Uzu had stopped and was looking at Itachi with keen eyes. Her head was tilted to one side slightly and the corner of her mouth was curved upwards. It was a sad smile.

“You have keen eyes Little Crow, and I’m not referring to the Sharingan.” Uzu laid a hand on his shoulder. “You saw more than Madara and Hashirama and Mito did. In fact, as far as I’m aware, no one has ever considered how humans make the Bijuu feel. Being able to identify the fear in a creature so different from yourself, well…”

She leaned in and pressed a kiss against his cheek. His eyes widened at the bussing of her lips against his skin. She didn’t linger and moved away steadily, giving him his space back.

“You are a very kind person, Itachi-kun.”

*

Itachi saw Uzu and Yugito and their odd group several more times through the war. Occasionally they would come to the aid of the other. He stopped counting how many times they helped him, and he helped them. They never asked for his aid, just as he never requested their help, but it was freely given.

He didn’t say anything to anyone in Konoha about the group. He didn’t want to betray Yugito and Matatabi. Something inside him told him that they wouldn’t harm Konoha and he had seen them in action and heard about them from other Konoha shinobi who had crossed paths less amicably with the red head and her foundlings.

Not one single casualty ever came from an interaction with Uzu. Not one. There were stories of chakra being drained from you by the shark man and his bandaged blade, bones broken and claw marks from the blonde who fought like a wildcat, being frozen motionless by a seal that took a while to wear off or being trapped in a barrier by multiple seals but never, not ever any deaths.

Itachi heard the rumours about Uzu. Those who had fought against her and survived were not always grateful and so they began to call her Kishi Bojin, saying that she was stealing children from war torn areas to eat them later.

When he shared this with Uzu and her foundlings at one of their unscheduled meetings, he expected Yugito and Kisame at the very least to be upset or angry. Instead they had laughed and laughed until tears were streaming down their face.

“I do not understand. Their words are intended to cause fear and harm.” Itachi frowned.

“Keh. Uzu is closer to Kishi Bojin than you think kid.” Kisame wiped tears from under his eyes.
“She hasn’t told you what she is, has she?”

Itachi’s frown deepened.

“Uzu-nee,” Yugito went onto her tiptoes and cupped her hands around her mouth to whisper into his ear. “Uzu-nee isn’t human. She’s the heart of Uzushio. She’s nature and love and wildness in a human body.”

“Is that why her chakra is so – raw?” Itachi asked.

Yugito grinned.

“She is wildness personified.”

“Hmm. For someone made of wildness and nature, she does like to hug a lot.” Itachi said dryly.

This time he did intend for his words to cause laughter and was inwardly pleased when Kisame began gasping for air and wheezing that he couldn’t breath. Uzu gave him a hug for that.

Itachi found he rather enjoyed receiving hugs. Especially when they were a reward for shutting Kisame up.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Kishi Bojin or Kishimojin – originally known as Kariteimo in India, was feared as a demon who had hundreds of her own children (that she loved) but captured and killed children of others to feed her children and herself. Buddha intervened by stealing the youngest of her sons and hiding him. Kishi Bojin searched for her son and finally asked Buddha for help. Buddha pointed out her suffering from losing one of hundreds of children and asked if she could imagine the suffering of parents whose only child had been consumed. She thought their suffering must be much greater than hers and vowed henceforth to protect all children and instead of eating children’s flesh she would only eat pomegranates. She became the protector of children and women in childbirth. Buddha gave her bodhi (knowledge/enlightenment/insight) which enabled her to withstand black magic and evil powers and the ability to cure the sick. In the Japanese version Kishi Bojin gets the aid of the Ten Raksasi Women to abduct and murder the children of other families. In different versions of the myth the Ten Raksasi Women are themselves daughter of Kishi Bojin. When Kishi Bojin accepts Buddha’s teaching the Ten Demon Daughters do as well.

Next Chapter - Jugo Part One: Jugo gets very angry. Uzu's smaller group are travelling and come across the effects of war on civilians. Uzu sings a lullaby.
Chapter Summary

Jugo Part One: Jugo gets very angry. Uzu's smaller group are travelling and come across the effects of war on civilians. Uzu sings a lullaby.

Chapter Notes

As always thank you for every subscription, bookmark, kudos and comment. I got a bit behind on replying to comments but I will try to carry on responding to them.

Content Warning: Death, slaughter of a village is implied, mass burning of bodies and destruction of land/homes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jūgo

(Part One)

*

Jūgo was frightened. There were strange people running through his village. Kaa-chan and Tou- chan hadn’t come to find him. Nee-chan hadn’t either. They had told him to hide and he was a good boy, so he did. He found the best hiding place in the whole village.

The birds and the rabbits had told him where it was. A hollow beneath the large tree in the far field. The rabbits said a badger had once lived there but was long gone. Jūgo had crawled into the hollow, squirming between the roots and scraping his cheek on the bark. He healed quickly so it wasn’t a big deal.

The strange people had run straight past him. They had greedy sneers on their faces. Then there had been lots of shouting and screaming. He thought he heard Tou-chan roaring. He only did that when he got really, really, really mad. But he had stopped roaring and then Kaa-chan screamed.

Now, there was the smell of smoke. The fields were burning. His village was burning. The homes and huts and crops set ablaze. The smoke was being blown into his hiding place and it stung his eyes and made his nose itch and burn.

The rabbits were hiding deeper in the hollow and their eyes were wide, their pupils blown, and their long silky ears pressed down tightly against their heads.

The strangers were laughing. He could hear them. They were laughing as they burnt his home down.

Jūgo felt frightened but he also felt angry. It surged up inside him, making him throb and he felt his body changing.
“Going to get them. They made everything and everyone go away. Going to rip them apart!” He growled and lunged from his hollow into the night.

*

“Woah.” Yugito murmured as they looked down at the burning village. The flames had illuminated the sky around for miles.

Matatabi had smelt it and said that it was accompanied by the stench of blood. Uzu’s mouth had thinned into a line and she led the way swiftly.

“I’m glad Tsunade-ba-chan isn’t here.” Yugito said to Kisame who had laid his hand on her shoulder.

“Keh. Probably wouldn’t be good for the old bat. Better for her and Shizune to stay with Kabuto on Uzushio.”

Yugito smiled weakly up at him.

“I miss Konan and Nagato and Yahiko though.”

Utakata held onto Uzu’s sleeve and tugged on it gently. Uzu breathed in and out slowly.

“Are you alright Okaa-san?”

She leaned over and pressed a kiss to Utakata’s head, ruffling his hair with her hand. He mock scowled but endured her affection happily.

“Keh, we’re going down there aren’t we?” Kisame rolled his shoulders and swung his arms back and forth, loosening them up. He was eager to hit something. Especially a person or people who would destroy what appeared to be an innocent farming village on the outskirts of the war.

“You know me so well, Kisame.” Uzu said glibly but began to lead the way down from the rise, navigating well-trod footpaths in the dark. Yugito and Utakata slipped in behind her and Kisame (as always) took the rear.

The village had been burning for a while. Many of the buildings had collapsed and were smouldering piles with a few straggling flames coaxing the last of the unburnt wood alight. Others were still raging and showed few signs of utter collapse yet.

Yugito pulled a cloth up over her mouth and nose. Matatabi’s presence made her more sensitive to smells. Utakata was luckier, Saiken’s sense of smell wasn’t as developed as the Nibi’s. He still raised his kimono sleeve to cover his mouth and nose too.

There was another scent in the air, apart from that of burning wood. A smell akin to burning bacon or pork. There was an acrid charcoal smell too, not that of wood but akin to hair caught in a candle’s flame.

“Gods. They killed everyone and burnt them.” Uzu muttered.

It was true. There were no bodies lying around in the roads or near the burning buildings. Instead, the main building, which had collapsed, contained a mound of flaming corpses and it was from this central building that the smell was emanating.

“Its horrible.” Yugito choked and tears welled up in her eyes. These weren’t trained shinobi. They
were simple farmers.

“Its war.” Kisame said almost coldly.

Utakata glared up at him and wrapped his arm around Yugito, bringing her in close to his side. The two Jinchūriki nestled together and were comforted internally by their Bijuu. It was times like this that they both secretly thought the Bijuu were right and that humans were despicable. Because, how could anyone human do this to another living, breathing, thinking human?

Uzu frowned and peered out into the night. She held a hand up and they all froze, watching, listening, waiting.

There was a growl from the darkness. Kisame pulled Samehada off his back and held the blade in both hands.

“They took them away. Going to kill them. Going to smash their heads. If it’s a woman we’ll kill them first, no a man, no a woman.” A manic growl rumbled over the noise of the fires.

“Move!” Uzu yelped and they all scattered.

A boy landed in their midst, his fist driving into the ground where they had been stood and shattering it. When he looked up his features were twisted grotesquely and by more than just the firelight. His body was mutated and there was drool dripping down from his mouth. Splatters of blood and streaks of it dripped off him.

“What in hell’s name is that?!” Kisame yelped and dodged as the boy/creature charged at him. He was forced to use Samehada to block a mutated fist. Samehada shrieked and writhed. “Keh, he has a lot of chakra. Kinda feels like your chakra Uzu.”

Kisame pushed the boy back and went into a low stance, ready for the next charge. Utakata blew his bubbles and they exploded around the boy, pushing him away from them. Uzu was frowning and watching the boy mutter to himself.

Yugito flinched as the boy’s eyes turned on her. He was manic. Crazy. Scarier than Matatabi had ever been. As if summoned the Nibi materialised in front of Yugito, a large feline but much smaller than her full size.

“Stay back boy!” She hissed and swiped at him when he made to charge at Yugito. The girl leapt onto Matatabi’s back and the Nibi dodged.

Saiken materialised too and began spitting out a stream of slime that coated the ground. Kisame, Uzu and Matatabi carefully avoided the liquid and tried to lead the boy into it. He seemed wary but charged onwards through the gloop.

Slowly his legs were coated in the slime as it splashed and arced up with every heavy footfall. Combined with the heat from the fires blazing around them it rapidly began to harden. Saiken burbled happily when the boy was eventually stopped and spewed out another load of the slime, coating the entire body, leaving only the head exposed.

“That should hold him long enough to slap on a chakra suppression seal Mother!” Saiken called and Uzu held up her hand that was already inked. She had been drawing the seal as she dodged the infuriated boy and the ink glistened in the light from the fire.

She leapt onto the hardened slime and coursed towards the boy who was already mutating further, trying to break the shell encasing him. One arm was freed but Kisame was there with a snapping
Samehada to block the blow. Uzu swerved around Kisame and ducked as the second arm swung at her. She slipped beneath the blow and her hand darted through the air to slap the boy on the forehead.

The seal transferred and a nudge from her chakra at the exact same moment of contact activated it. The boy went still and quiet.

Kisame breathed in and out slowly, feeling his arms trembling slightly from the ferocity of the attack. It had taken a lot of strength to hold the boy back. In fact, he wasn’t sure that he would have been able to hold him back for much longer.

Uzu pulled him away from the still boy and he went eagerly. There was a difference between staring a Bijuu down and facing a human who was so transformed by rage and anger.

Matatabi brought Yugito closer and the girl looked over Kisame and Uzu with worried eyes. Utakata scampered over too and prodded at a scrape on Kisame’s bicep. The boy had managed to catch him with a sharp claw and the wound was oozing slowly.

“Let me wrap that up.” Utakata pulled out a scroll and unsealed a medkit. Kisame sank down onto the ground and allowed both younger kids to fuss over him. His eyes remained fixed on the boy sealed in the slime, however.

“What’re we gonna do about that brat?” He rumbled to Uzu who was standing off to the side with Saiken looming over her. The slug Bijuu’s eyestalks were waving around agitatedly.

“It isn’t his fault.” Uzu murmured sadly. “He’s a descendant of the Obake clan. Well, a branch of them anyway.”

“Obake? Weren’t they the ones who could mutate their bodies?” Yugito piped up. She was warily watching the boy too. His head had tipped back, and he was staring up at the smoke billowing against the blackness of the night and the tiny embers that were dancing on the air currents. He seemed almost serene considering that only moments ago he had been charging at them with the intent to kill.

“Mmm.” Uzu confirmed. “They came to Uzushio and some of them decided to stay whilst others remained for a while before leaving for the mainland. The Obake of Uzushio never had issues with keeping their mind, however. This child – he is absorbing nature chakra and his rage is twisting it. That is affecting his mind.”

“So, he’s essentially having a nature chakra powered tantrum?” Kisame scoffed.

Uzu winced and Utakata slapped him on his uninjured forearm.

“I think his rage was probably prompted by the slaughter and destruction of his village, a bit more severe than a tantrum, but the sentiment stands.” She replied.

“Well, how do we calm him down?” Yugito rested against Matatabi’s front legs. The Nibi was twitching her two tails and brought them to wrap around Yugito, bringing her closer to the Bijuu.

“I have no idea.” Uzu admitted.

* 

Jūgo was angry. He was angry and sad and frightened and lonely. He wanted his Kaa-chan. His Tou-chan. His Nee-chan. He wanted to feed the chickens. He wanted to curl up with their cat. He
wanted to eat rice and pickled vegetables. He wanted to play with his friends. He wanted to go and talk to the animals that lived nearby. He wanted his Kaa-chan to scold him for getting his clothes filthy. He wanted his Nee-chan to tell him stories about the first animals. He wanted his Tou-chan to show him how to bring in the harvest.

He wanted so much. It was ripping him apart.

He screamed and the sound rent the air in two.

They weren’t coming back.

He was so angry.

Then, there was a gentle hand on his head. A lullaby being hummed and fingers carding through his hair.

His anger slipped away. Tears replacing it.

He wailed into the burning night.

The lullaby didn’t cease but continued as he wailed. A counterpoint to his grief.

Jūgo was so very, very sad.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Jugo Part Two: In which there are lullabies, Utakata praises his Bijuu friend and Jugo cries.
Jugo - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Jugo Part Two: In which there are lullabies, Utakata praises his Bijuu friend and Jugo cries.

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always for every subscription, bookmark, kudos and comment!

Content Warning: Grief and loss. Everyone handles this differently, so please read with caution.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jūgo

(Part Two)

*

Uzu had stood with the boy all night. She had hummed a lullaby over and over and over. Her children had watched warily, Saiken ready to spit out more slime if needed and Matatabi ready to pounce but the boy had stopped screaming and begun wailing.

The sound tore at Yugito and Utakata. They hadn’t heard such a sorrowful cry before. Kisame grit his teeth and stalked off towards the buildings. He couldn’t stand around doing nothing. He spent the night dousing the burning buildings and fields with water, using Suiton jutsu until they were damp smouldering piles of blackened wood and burnt soil.

It would be a while before anything grew here again.

Eventually, the boy stopped wailing and his head dropped to his slime covered chest.

Uzu continued her humming but cupped the boy’s cheeks and tilted his head up.

He had fallen asleep. Drained from his raging and from his grieving.

“Saiken, how do I get him out of your slime?” Uzu rasped.

The Bijuu trotted over on his stumpy legs, Utakata yawning at his side but was intrigued to see how this slime worked. It was a new one that Saiken hadn’t demonstrated before.

“You just need to add water, Mother. I made it so it will harden in heat but apply moisture and it will soften right up again! You should be able to get the tiny squishy out that way and the slime will ooze right off!” Saiken chirped.
“Good work Saiken.” Utakata yawned and leaned against the fairly large version of his Bijuu. Saiken’s tails wiggled in pleasure and his eyestalks peered down at the pleased boy. Their relationship had been much improved since Uzu altered the seal and Utakata was almost eager to team up with and learn from his Bijuu. The boy also began to compliment his slime and various attacks and think of ways to combine them with his own jutsu.

“Thanks, Uta-kun!” Saiken burbled happily, his voice shrill.

Utakata shrugged and leaned into the slug’s side. Despite being covered in mucus and slime, Saiken made a pretty good pillow. And he didn’t mind Utakata taking naps against him even if they only lasted a few minutes.

“Kisame, do you have enough chakra to perform another Suiton jutsu? And maybe one a bit less – ferocious – than your usual?” Uzu called out.

Kisame rolled his eyes. “You’re too gentle Uzu.” But he complied with a steady stream of water that came from his mouth and directed it over the boy and Uzu.

It rained down from above them, like raindrops. The moment it made contact with the hardened slime it reacted and there was a soft hissing noise as the slime began to fizz. It didn’t burn or smell however but fizzed and bubbled and began to melt away.

Soon Uzu was left holding the heavy boy up against her and wishing that she didn’t have so many layers on. Water was hell on silk and as almost all her robes and various layers were silk they also became much heavier when wet. It would take days to dry them all out.

She sighed but really couldn’t find it in herself to mind too much. This poor boy was worth a few ruined robes. It wasn’t as if she didn’t have several more stored away in scrolls. And with Uzushio inhabited once again by the descendants of some of those who had made them, there was a high chance she would be able to purchase more.

“Want me to take him?” Kisame grunted and picked up the boy, slinging him carefully over his shoulder without waiting for Uzu’s reply.

Utakata roused himself from his leaning nap and linked his arm with Uzu, helping her climb out of the slime pool and back onto dry earth.

“Uzu-nee! Matatabi and I found a field to camp in!” Yugito called from where she was lounging on her back on Matatabi’s back. The pair had perfected the art of Yugito napping on Matatabi’s back as the Bijuu walked and they had it down perfectly now. Matatabi didn’t really require much sleep but Yugito was still a growing girl who liked the occasional nap and there was something pleasant about sleeping on Matatabi as she walked. A peaceful rocking motion as she prowled and strolled along.

Matatabi purred as Yugito yawned and fell back into the early stages of sleep.

“Kitten is right. It is close to a small forest and there are no signs of recent human activity. It is far enough from the village to avoid the smell too.” The tips of Matatabi’s tails flicked, the only sign of her displeasure at the state of the settlement.

Whilst she might not like most humans, at her core Matatabi was kind and this inhumane slaughter and burning was not acceptable.

“Lead on then.” Uzu gestured. “And thank you all. This boy may not be a direct descendent, but he is descended from Uzushio.”
“Keh. It doesn’t matter if this kid is family or not. He’s a kid who’s had a hard hand dealt to him. We knew there was no way you would just leave him. You can’t help it, and to be honest, I think you’re training us to be like that too. I almost contemplated letting that rabbit go the other night. It looked like it had young ones to feed. Then I remembered that rabbits breed like wildfire and I regained my senses.” Kisame scoffed and adjusted the boy on his shoulder slightly.

Uzu snickered and shook her head fondly.

“One would almost think you had a soft spot Kisame.”

“Well I don’t. So, don’t go spreading disgusting rumours around. You know the Ame trio will help. That Nagato is surprisingly vicious with spreading lies.” Kisame continued muttering as he followed an amused Matatabi and Yugito.

*

Jūgo woke and he felt tired. His whole body ached as if he had been helping plough the fields or bring the harvest in all day. The surface beneath him felt softer than his futon usually did. Had he fallen asleep in a field again?

There was warmth all around him, pressed in close to his body, nestling in the crook of his neck and resting on his chest. He could sense his animal friends slumbering next to him and he felt his sore body relax.

A rumbling purr was throbbing through his chest and he lifted his head slightly and opened his eyes to see his cat peering down at him through slit eyes. The bright green of her gaze was soft and happy as she catnapped in her favourite spot.

“Kōgō…” He rasped and was startled when his voice sounded weak and his throat was tender. It felt like he had been shouting or had a cold. The cat continued purring but nuzzled her nose against his.

“Kōgō, did I fall asleep in the field again?” Kōgō didn’t answer but her purrs slowly ceased.

“I’m afraid you didn’t.” A woman leaned over him, filling his vision. He blinked up at her.

“Who’re you? Where am I?” He forced the words out. A sense of dread was filling him. His skin was clammy, and he wanted to sit up but didn’t have the strength to do so.

“I am Uzu. My children and I found you.” The woman introduced herself and her children who leaned in one by one to give him a smile, wave or nod.

“Where’s my Kaa-chan, my Tou-chan, Nee-chan?”

Uzu bit her lower lip. Jūgo felt panic filling his chest. He breathed in and out quicker and quicker. Kōgō slipped off his chest and sat a few inches away. The animals surrounding him scarpered too, sensing his panic.

“Your village was attacked.” Uzu began. Her voice was calm and steady. “We saw the flames from a few miles away and came to see what had happened. Your village did not survive. The only person left alive was you.”

“But… I don’t… Nee-chan… I…” He stammered and his breath felt like it wouldn’t stay in his body. He fought against the blanket laid over him.
“Easy kid.” Kisame said and held him down gently.

“Breath slowly.” Uzu demonstrated, breathing in deep through her nose and exhaling slowly out through her mouth. She repeated this over and over until Jūgo was able to do it with her. Tears leaked from his eyes and trickled into his hair.

“They’re all gone?” He queried tremulously. “All of them?”

Uzu nodded. He squeezed his eyes shut and the tears continued to trickle down. His mouth opened in a soundless wail and he shook with the force of his grief. Uzu laid down next to him and pulled him into her body.

He went easily, sinking his face into her soft form and gripping her side and clothing with strong fingers. She winced as his fingers sunk into the skin and muscle of her waist but shook her head when Utakata and Kisame made to remove them. She could take a little physical discomfort and bruising.

Yugito buried her face in Matatabi’s side and Saiken patted the young girl’s back with a tail.

Although they had been travelling through war-ridden lands for a few months now, there hadn’t been many survivors and those they had seen were already twisted from grief or given up on life. They hadn’t come across anyone who was at the start of processing such a loss. Especially not a loss as senseless as the one they had seen the final hours of.

Uzu crooned and hummed a lullaby as the boy wept on her. Kisame brought Utakata into his side and let him shed his own tears on his chest.

They all stayed silent however, listening to Uzu’s lullaby and empathising with the boy’s grief. Sorrow was all too familiar to them. Sorrow and loss. It was part of a shinobi’s life and they all knew what it felt like.

For now, there was not much they could do but honour his grief. Later there would be time to help him. But in this moment, they could wait and listen and pray for his lost ones.

Prayers were all they had to offer. That and Uzu’s lullabies and her embrace.

This boy wasn’t alone in his sorrow and they wouldn’t let him be alone in the future. He was one of them now and they were family.

*

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Kōgō – means empress

Next Chapter - Jugo Part Three: Uzu collects war orphans. We find out where the Ame trio have been and Jugo thinks Nagato is awesome. There's a visit to Uzushio and
then Jugo proves that he's a Disney Princess (because the animals tell him something important).
**Jugo - Part Three**

Chapter Summary

Jugo Part Three: Uzu collects war orphans. We find out where the Ame trio have been and Jugo thinks Nagato is awesome. There's a visit to Uzushio and then Jugo proves that he's a Disney Princess (because the animals tell him something important).

Chapter Notes

So, we reached 250 kudos! You know what that means? Double update! Cause I'm nice like that!

Thanks as always for every subscription, bookmark, kudos and comment. Shout out to MzGreenJeans73 who's comments are making me laugh and cry simultaneously.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jūgo

(Part Three)

*  

Jūgo was quiet. He was quiet all the time. He didn’t cry noisily, he didn’t laugh, he didn’t talk, he didn’t whimper, he didn’t scream, he didn’t shout, he didn’t even snicker at Kisame and Yugito’s rough housing and teasing.

It would have been disconcerting to Uzu’s foundlings if they hadn’t seen the cause of his grief. As it was, they understood his need to remain silent and respected it. They talked to him and waited for an answer but if none was provided, they just carried on their conversation as if he had spoken.

Uzu didn’t talk to Jūgo very much, but she would walk alongside him, holding his hand and cuddle him close at night when terrors haunted his dreams and he woke in a cold sweat.

They had left the ruins of his home behind them. A day spent crying and grieving and then another resting and eating and sleeping before a final slow walk through the village to see if anything was salvageable enough for Jūgo to keep.

Matatabi had been the one to ask Kōgō, the cat, for Jūgo’s name as he had fallen utterly silent once his tears subsided and Uzu refused to call him anything but his name.

“He has lost too much already. His name was from his parents and it contains their memory.” She had said and that was that.

Unfortunately, there was nothing left of Jūgo’s house nor of any of the other houses or buildings. Even the main building, their village hall, was burnt down to the ground. Kisame had left that one ablaze. It was where the villagers had been placed to burn and so in essence it had become their
funeral pyre. He wasn’t about to go dousing the flames as that would have resulted in almost fully burnt skeletons which would have either been left to the elements or he and Utakata would have had to dig a mass grave.

A funeral pyre was a better option (although not one of choice) and they had all paused in front of the ashes of this building, some of which were still smouldering, to pray and give their respects to the unnamed and unknown villagers.

Those who had attacked the village had been ripped apart savagely. Kisame and Matatabi (who were the most accustomed to death) had removed their remains from the village and dumped them unceremoniously far away. They didn’t bother to bury the murderers but left their corpses to rot and degrade or be eaten by animals.

The only thing that had survived from the village was Kōgō and she agreed to come with them. Her pale gold coat and relaxed form draped around Jūgo’s neck, her whiskers brushing his cheek, reminding him of her presence.

No one, not even Kisame, commented on the cat’s presence. They weren’t about to deny him his pet and the only remnant apart from his name that he had. Besides, Kōgō was much more interactive than Genbu-chan and everyone took turns carrying Kabuto and Yahiko’s tortoise (they all secretly thought that Genbu-chan made an excellent sounding board for pranks or for moaning too).

* 

Time passed and Uzu and her family found themselves collecting war orphans from all over the nations. It was heart breaking to see families torn apart and young children who had absolutely nothing to do with the war being left to fend for themselves.

She led them to Ame to check on Konan, Yahiko and Nagato.

Jūgo and Kōgō didn’t enjoy the rain much. The young boy did enjoy spending time with Nagato however. The two bonded quietly with Nagato playing his koto and singing songs to Jūgo during quiet still moments.

“Do you think I’m pretty?” Nagato asked Jūgo one day.

The young boy tilted his head and looked at Nagato (Kogo did the same). After long consideration and taking in Nagato’s purple eyes and red hair, his almost feminine bone structure and his graceful fingers, Jūgo nodded.

Nagato sighed.

“I don’t think there’s anything wrong with being pretty. But I am a guy. Is it alright for guys to be pretty?” He asked.

Jūgo nodded again. He looked up and pointed to two birds that were darting around in the sunny rain shower, enjoying the light rainfall and sunshine together. He held his hand out and the two small birds came and landed on his palm. Kogo licked her lips but stayed still next to Nagato (who placed a restraining hand on the scruff of her neck anyway).

One of the birds was iridescent, shimmering dark feathers that when the light hit them just right seemed transformed into an aurora of greens, blues and purples. In comparison the other bird was far less mesmerising, garbed in shades of brown and cream.
Nagato wrinkled his nose and sighed again.

“I understand what you mean. You’re right, a lot of male birds are pretty. In fact, a lot of male animals are more stunning compared the females…”

Jūgo smiled softly and then pushed his hand up encouraging the birds to take flight once more. Kogo let out a disgruntled growl but settled when Nagato gave her scratches behind her ear.

“Hmm. I suppose being pretty and male aren’t exclusive.” Nagato said.

There was a soft giggle behind them and they all turned to see Uzu approaching with a plate of apple slices.

“Having a deep conversation about beauty and the male form?” Uzu teased and stroked Nagato’s hair as he flushed.

“There was a little girl, one of the ones you’re going to take to Uzushio actually, who said that I was ‘weally pwetty’.” Nagato explained and handed Jūgo and apple slice. “We were just discussing that it is acceptable to be male and pretty. Like birds.”

Uzu nodded solemnly and sank down next to Jūgo, the young boy crawling into her lap the second she was seated. He snuggled in and munched on the apple slices. She pressed a kiss to his hair before turning back to look at Nagato who was watching almost wistfully.

“And you’ve decided that men can be pretty or beautiful?” She inquired.

Nagato nodded. “Jūgo was very helpful. Maybe I should come to him for all the deep questions.”

Jūgo shook his head and held out an apple slice instead. Nagato leaned forward and snapped his teeth near the boy’s fingers, as if he was going to bite them instead, eliciting a small but encouraging giggle from the child. Smiling he took the apple slice instead and hummed as the slightly tart but sweet juice filled his mouth.

“I see. Well done, Jūgo. We all need a little help realising things sometimes.” Uzu praised. “Is there anything else bothering you Nagato?”

The Uzumaki blushed and mumbled incoherently. Uzu smiled knowingly. Jūgo and Kōgō shared looks before deciding to leave the pair to it and go and see what other animals they could find. Ame lacked a lot of wildlife and the wildlife it did have was resilient and told interesting stories. He knew when grown ups needed to have an ‘adult’ conversation and they were usually pretty boring.

*

Uzushio was a strange island but Jūgo liked it. There was lots of interesting people, who were all happy and smiling and kind even though there was a war raging on the mainland. The island was peaceful and he learnt how to swim in the ocean and how to fly a kite off the cliffs, how the fisherman navigated the whirlpools to catch fish and how the women would dive for oysters and clams.

He met his youngest brother, Kabuto, who was much smarter than he was but was nice anyway and Tsunade-ba-chan who was loud but when she patted Jūgo on the head after his medical exam her touch was gentle. She was a lot of barking and little biting, like some of the small dogs he’d met, although she did send Kisame flying into a tree when he called her old one too many times.
The shark toothed man had just laughed and brushed splinters off his top before engaging Tsunade-ba-chan in a spar. Shizune-nee had sighed loudly and exasperatedly before taking Kabuto and Jūgo to go and get snacks (Tsunade and Kisame didn’t get any snacks because they hadn’t behaved).

The other orphans Uzu had gathered didn’t live with them. Yugito-nee-chan said it was because Uzu’s children were special in different ways. The other children needed parents and guardians who would lead normal, steady lives and help them cope with their grief and loss but Uzu’s foundlings were usually stronger or had secrets that they needed to protect.

Jūgo worried that Okaa-san (he liked how Kabuto and Utakata called her that, even though they knew she wasn’t their real mother but she treated them like they were hers anyway) was afraid he would hurt people. Hurt them the same way he had killed those who had attacked his village and killed his real Kaa-chan and Tou-chan and Nee-chan.

Kogo told him he was being silly. But he worried about it anyway.

Okaa-san seemed to sense his worry and showed him the Obake clan home.

“This is where your ancestors, or some of them at least, stayed and lived.” Uzu explained as she led him through the old house and out into the wilderness that surrounded it.

“They held great strength and abilities but ultimately they were very kind. They didn’t enjoy fighting and hurting others and preferred looking after people and animals. I know you’re the same Jūgo-kun.”

Jūgo nodded and grinned as a doe and her fawn stepped out from the trees and nibbled at the clover that grew all over the Obake lands. The doe came and nuzzled his hair, lipping it with her soft muzzle and coating the strands in her spit. The fawn pranced over and invited him to play. Uzu pushed him forward with a hand on his back and he spent a while playing chase with the young buck.

When the deer settled down to graze, Jūgo returned to Okaa-san and held her hand.

“The children who were adopted are ones whose lineage is not of Uzushiogakure.” Uzu began again. “Kisame is the only current exception of my children who is not descended from an Uzushiogakure clan. But he is one of mine. If there hadn’t been enough homes for the other children I would have taken them in too, but my people are kind and giving and know the loss of losing their home and family and want to help others through their own loss. If you would be happier remaining on Uzushio and living with another family I can find one for you Jūgo-kun?”

Jūgo shook his head frantically. He wanted to stay with Uzu, Kisame, Yugito-nee, Utakata-nii, Kabuto-kun, Shizune-nee and Tsunade-ba-chan.

Uzu smiled down at him before scooping him up to carrying him. His legs wrapped around her waist and he squeezed his arms around her neck, tucking them beneath her silky hair.

“Well, alright then. But if you ever change your mind the offer remains.”

*  

When they returned to the mainland Uzu led them around the main conflict and to the less involved nations towards the Land of Snow. Her children were excited to go to a land of snow, some of them having only experienced it once or twice during their years on Uzushio which was a bit warmer and didn’t always experience a heavy winter.
Jūgo was walking with Kogo on his shoulders when the calls of the birds made him stop. He listened carefully and a frown formed on his face.

Utakata stopped next to him and looked down.

“What’s wrong Jūgo-kun? Are you tired?”

Uzu turned back and crouched down and looked into Jūgo’s eyes.

He licked his lips and then a soft and crackling voice came from within him.

“Okaa-san, there’s a boy in a cage. And he’s lonely.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kimimaro Part One:
If Jugo is a Disney Princess does that make Kimimaro his Prince? Uzu is disgusted by the Kaguya clan's parenting practices and Kimimaro longs for freedom.... Actually Kimimaro is a version of Rapunzel except instead of a tower he's kept in a cage.
Kimimaro - Part One

Chapter Summary

Kimimaro is Rapunzel. He longs to feel the grass beneath his feet and that summer breeze. Uzu is disgusted at the Kaguya clan's parenting practices.

Chapter Notes

Double update! Make sure you've read Jugo Part Three before this one!

Read it? Welcome back and continue on with Kimimaro the Prince/Princess in distress.

Content Warning:
Child abuse, child neglect, imprisonment, crippling, inhumane conditions (such a happy chapter)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kimimaro

(Part One)

*

His cage was too small. Or maybe he’d grown. It was hard to tell when he was inside it almost permanently, curled up against the bars that pressed in on all four sides and above him. Sometimes, when they let him out, he couldn’t feel his legs and it was only sheer willpower that let him move whilst he bathed before he was forced back into the cage.

He hated his cage. He loathed the cold bars that pressed into his back when he tried to sleep at night. He detested the ungiving wooden boards beneath him which were only softened by a thin blanket as he kept the thicker one to wrap around himself on cold nights.

He hated how everyone would peer into his cage with upturned noses, curled lips and bared teeth. Sometimes he bared his teeth back when he was feeling particularly trapped. That always made them back off.

He wanted to go out of his cage. Wanted to walk and feel the ground beneath his feet, learn what different plants felt like, what sand felt like – he thought it might feel hot. He wanted to be free. At night when the rest of his clan slept, he sometimes wondered if he would die in this cage. Sometimes he wondered if dying wouldn’t be better than the cage.

His clan wouldn’t let him go or let him die though. They kept him fed and gave him clothing and they carried his cage wherever they travelled to fight. The metal and wood monstrosity loaded onto a cart and pulled along by a mule.
The clan leader said that he would have to fight for the clan soon. He didn’t know how they expected him to do that when he could barely stand up. He didn’t want to either. He hated how his clan with their vicious natures, cold eyes and battle hungry grins tore into other people as if death and fighting was a game they deserved to win.

That attitude had caused the only other child to be killed. She had been just as bloodthirsty as the rest of them. He had seen her corpse. She had died with a grin on her face even though her body had been all but cut in half. He had been sick when he saw that. The smell hadn’t left his cage for days.

Kimimaro didn’t know what he would do when they eventually let him out to fight. He was older than she had been, and it was only their fear of his abilities that had kept him locked up and out of the fight. Would they finally kill him if he refused to fight?

Kimimaro watched and thought and dreamed. It was all he knew to do.

*

The cacophony at the edge of their camp woke him. They were further north than they had been in a while, at the edges of the war raging through the nations. The clan leader had said that he would have to fight in a few days, for the honour of the Kaguya clan. Kimimaro had snarled and spat at him.

He didn’t get food that night.

His grumbling belly had disturbed him even as he fell asleep. Now he was awake again, the rumbling persisted.

He pushed his hunger to the back of his mind and twisted around in his cage to peer into the darkness and the shapes of his clansmen who were shouting and raging. He couldn’t see what was happening.

He rubbed at his eyes with his knuckles and then opened them. If he could have, he would have reared back in surprise at the young girl who had suddenly appeared and was staring at him with a disapproving look. Instead he blinked slowly and whispered to her.

“Who are you? You should leave. If they catch you, they’ll kill you.”

She wrinkled her nose and frowned.

“Why are you in a cage?” She retorted.

“That doesn’t matter!” Kimimaro hissed, glancing around his cage to check his clansmen hadn’t noticed her. “You need to go!”

The girl scowled even harder before slipping away into the darkness of the night. Kimimaro felt a pang in his chest mingled with relief. Part of him had hoped she wouldn’t leave. But it was better this way. She didn’t deserve to die.

To his horror the girl returned, this time accompanied by a woman. He grasped the bars of his cage futilely.

“You need to go!” He pleaded.

The woman ignored him and turned her attention to the lock on his cage and the seal plastered over
it. She scowled and curled her upper lip up. Kimimaro winced. He hoped that look wasn’t for him. She didn’t seem happy.

A brush and inkpot were pulled from her sleeve and she uncapped the pot and dipped the brush tip in before drawing on the seal. He watched her for a few seconds before turning his attention back to the girl who was facing away from his cage and watching his clansmen who were still raging and shouting at the edge of the camp.

He could faintly hear the sounds of weapons and someone shouting mockingly. There were also lots of injured yelps and angry calls that he recognised from his kin.

“You really should go. I don’t know what you hope to accomplish. Only the person who placed the seal can remove it and I don’t even know why you want to let me out.” His voice trailed off.

The woman looked up and he caught his breath at the intensity of her eyes. She seemed to pierce him and see him, not just the monster his brethren thought him to be. Not the beast only suitable for killing to keep in a cage but the little boy who wanted to be free.

“I’m not leaving you in a cage. If you don’t want to come with us, I will open it and let you make your own decision. If you want to come with us for now then you can change your mind at any time and I swear, on the Sage of Six Paths, that you can go wherever you want and no one will stop you.”

Her voice was so earnest. She pressed her hand to the altered seal and pulsed energy through it. The seal flared before crumbling to ash, leaving only the lock as a barrier to freedom.

“Yugito.” The woman said and swapped places with the girl, pulling a wakizashi from her sleeve after returning the ink and brush. The newly named Yugito cocked her head on one side before growling slightly and reaching out to grasp the lock.

Blue and black chakra flared around her arm and hand and with her teeth bared in an open and vicious snarl she wrenched at the lock, pulling hard. The lock groaned and Kimimaro held onto the bars as his cage shook slightly from the force. It snapped and she pulled the fragments away, dropping them onto the cold ground carelessly.

His cage door swung open after she slid the bolt back and he stared out at her. Freedom was there, hovering tantalisingly in front of him. But if he left the cage would it all turn out to be a trick? Would his clan suddenly appear and force him back inside the bars? Would his freedom disappear as quickly as it came?

“Are you going to get out or not?” Yugito said with an amused laugh.

Kimimaro crawled forward and extended one hand out, landing on the cool soil and flinching at the unexpected sensation of cold. No one from his clan appeared and he swallowed. Another crawling motion and he was out of the cage on all fours, freely breathing in the night air.

“Well done.” Yugito praised and then grabbed at his arm, hauling him up.

He struggled to get his feet to work beneath him. They didn’t seem to know how to take the weight of his body. And his legs were shaking within seconds.

“Uzu-nee.” Yugito called worriedly and the woman spun around. Kimimaro could tell she had been paying attention not only to his clan but to the girl with the speed with which she took in Yugito’s short frame propping his thin and quivering form up.
“When did you last walk?” Uzu asked.

“I can’t remember.” He admitted panting heavily. He was trying not to lean on Yugito but his body just wouldn’t cooperate. “I stay in the cage most of the time. I’m only allowed out to bathe when they let me.”

Yugito snarled animalistically but her hands remained gentle on his arm and waist. Uzu seemed just as infuriated. Kimimaro didn’t understand why they were so incensed. They had only just met, and they didn’t even know why he was kept in a cage.

Uzu looked him up and down assessing. She sheathed her wakizashi and slipped it into her sleeve before striding over and pulling one of his arms up onto her shoulder and behind her neck. Her arm went around his back and the other beneath his knees and she swung him up as easily as if he were made of paper.

Yugito snickered but fell silent when Uzu began to march off, leaving his still battling clansmen and his loathed cage behind. Kimimaro stared up at the woman’s face as best he could in the darkness of the night.

It didn’t make sense. Why was she holding him like he was – precious?

“I don’t understand.” He finally bleated out. His confusion and his hope was curled up painfully inside him, a twisted ball of feelings that he didn’t, couldn’t unravel.

“I don’t suppose you would.” Uzu said. “But, you are a child. Not something to be kept under a seal, a lock or in a cage that is far too small. You are a person. You are important. You deserve to be free and you deserve better than you have received.”

Yugito hummed in agreement.

“But you don’t know me. You don’t know what I can do. You should be afraid of me.” Kimimaro stated.

The sound of his voice made Uzu’s heart weep. He sounded so certain. As if he was something to be terrified. Something to be locked away. As if he wasn’t a child who deserved love and care.

“Uzu-nee isn’t afraid of you. I’m not either.” Yugito chirped and skipped alongside the woman. Kimimaro twisted his head to peer at the girl.

“People were afraid of me too. They kept me locked up in a different way to you. But then, Uzu-nee came and she took me away and she wasn’t afraid of me and she helped me. Now I know that what they did to me wasn’t right and I can make my own decisions and no one forces me to do things that I don’t want to do anymore.”

Kimimaro looked back up at Uzu who had finally paused. The moonlight broke through from behind the clouds that had been masking it. Her eyes had softened and there was a curve to her lips that had been missing whilst she freed him. Kimimaro didn’t think he had ever seen someone look at him that way.

“You are a person.” Uzu murmured. “You deserve to be free. Do you not want that?”

Kimimaro nodded weakly. Hope was raging inside him.

“I don’t have to go into another cage?” He whispered.
“No!” Uzu said fiercely and tilted him so that she could lean and press her forehead against his. She was so warm. He didn’t know people could feel this warm.

“I can be free?”

She stared into his eyes, their foreheads still pressed together, her arms firm but not hard like the bars of his cage around him.

“Yes. You are free.”

Kimimaro closed his eyes and breathed deeply.

Freedom felt and smelt good.

*

Chapter End Notes

So, as far as I can recall from canon (and I admit I haven’t watched Naruto Uzumaki Chronicles properly in a looonnngg time) we never really got that much detail on Kimimaro's back story so I kinda did what I wanted to. And I really don't care about the non-existent timeline, just let it burn.

Next Chapter - Kimimaro Part Two: Uzu is a dedicated Mama even with her newest foundling (whom she totally kidnapped but Kimimaro isn't complaining). Matatabi is the best Bijuu in the world (according to Yugito) and Kimimaro is still worried about being caged.
Chapter Summary

Kimimaro Part Two: Uzu is a dedicated Mama even with her newest foundling (whom she totally kidnapped but Kimimaro isn't complaining). Matatabi is the best Bijuu in the world (according to Yugito) and Kimimaro is still worried about being caged.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, comments and kudos!

I've succumbed to Tumblr so go to my profile and follow the link if you'd like to chat more there (FYI I have no idea what I'm doing with Tumblr, I've resisted joining for years).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kimimaro

(Part Two)

*

Uzu didn’t put him down for the rest of the night. She walked and walked and walked through the early hours of the morning and well into dawn before they finally stopped. Yugito didn’t have the same stamina but a blue and black cat made of flames appeared and gave her a lift, prowling along and chatting with Uzu whilst the girl slept.

Kimimaro had heard the cat call Uzu ‘Mother’. It seemed strange, that the girl called Uzu sister and the cat made of fire called her mother, but he couldn’t really bring himself to care. He was so happy to be free and feel the distance between him and his clan members increase step by step.

Finally, Uzu judged them to have travelled far enough. They had put a great deal of distance between them and his clan. Uzu sank wearily down next to a great lake having crossed it and found a sheltered nook where they could build a fire and rest.

Matatabi laid down and Uzu tucked Kimimaro in alongside the feline’s flank. She lovingly lifted Yugito and tucked her next to Kimimaro. Kimimaro flinched at the sheer enormous heat the girl was emanating, and the feeling of her small body pressed unafraid against his.

“If you don’t want her touching you, I can move her along.” Uzu offered having seen Kimimaro’s flinch.

“It’s just, I’m not the kind of person people normally want to come near… or touch.” Kimimaro murmured but relaxed.

The cat rumbled discontentedly but took the weight of both children easily. She was the softest
thing Kimimaro had ever felt, her blue and black flames comforting against his back. Much softer than his cage.

Uzu clucked her tongue slightly but carried on arranging them so that they could rest comfortably. She unwrapped a thick fur cloak she had been wearing and laid it over them, tucking their feet and arms beneath it, creating a cocoon of heat.

The soft strands of white fur tickled his nose. It made him want to sneeze. Yugito murmured and burrowed her head down and into his upper arm, completely disappearing beneath the fur.

“She’s really not afraid.” Kimimaro said.

“Of course not.” Uzu said in a brisk but kind tone. She rummaged around in a side bag that had been revealed once she removed her cloak and pulled out a pair of tabi and a woolly hat. She carefully extracted his feet from beneath the cloak and rolled the socks over his cool toes and up over his ankles, one at a time. Then she gently stroked his long hair back from his face and eased the wool hat (with a fat bobble on top) down to cover the tips of his ears.

“There we go.” Uzu tapped him on the tip of his nose with her finger. “You should be all snug and warm enough to rest for a while. I’ll get a fire going and then I’m going to find the rest of my children. You don’t need to worry about keeping watch. Matatabi will do that won’t you?”

The cat nodded and they watched together as Uzu gathered some dry sticks and made a fire pit, drawing out some wispy strands of grass from her bag and a flint. It took a few strikes and careful blowing, but the grass caught. She added wood and there was a cheerily snapping fire. Uzu placed a pile of tinder nearby, close enough that Kimimaro could sneak his hand out and toss one onto the fire.

“Okay, will you be alright for a bit with Matatabi and Yugito, Little Prince?” Uzu crouched down next to him and tapped his nose again.

“I’m Kimimaro, not Little Prince.” He replied and his eyes crossed as he tried to look at the tip of his nose. Was there something on his nose? Why did she keep tapping it?

Matatabi chuckled beneath him.

“It’s a nickname. Once Mother gives you one, you’re officially adopted. But it is nice to meet you Kimimaro.” The cat purred.

“Indeed. Kimimaro is a fine name.” Uzu agreed and tapped his nose once more.

She stood up and brushed her hands together before waving and trotting back across the lake.

Kimimaro watched her go with a hint of panic in his chest. He didn’t know why. He had only just met her, but he didn’t like her leaving him.

“She’ll be back soon.” Matatabi said. “You don’t need to worry. Mother won’t have to look very far. I can sense that my brother and her other children aren’t too far away. Rest Kimimaro. She will be back.”

The feline’s reassurances eased the knot of worry in his chest. He found himself yawning widely. When he had finished, he licked his lips and sank deeper against Matatabi, nuzzling under the fur.

Yugito mumbled in her sleep and wrapped her arm over his torso, snuggling in next to him.
It felt nice.

As his eyes slowly blinked, sleep beckoning him, Kimimaro watched the sun shining off the calm lake’s surface. He hadn’t seen so much space before or at least, not without bars between him and the wide openness. Was all the world like this? If so, he could get used to it.

* 

A symphony of snores woke Kimimaro. He felt himself tense abruptly when he woke as he was no longer alone with Yugito curled up beneath the fur and against Matatabi. They had been joined by two boys.

One, a rather feminine looking boy with shaggy brown hair snoring softly with little hitches to his breath, had his head resting on Kimimaro’s shoulder. There was a strange lump beneath the cloak where his lap. The lump was moving, and strange bubbly snores were emanating from it.

The other boy was leaning against Matatabi’s shoulder, the opposite side of Yugito who was still buried. This boy still had baby fat rounding his face. His nose wrinkled every now and again from the white cat’s paw that was dangling over his face. Said cat was lying over the boy’s head. He was making loud snores, louder than Kimimaro would have expected from his size.

The loudest snores of all were coming from the man laid out between the fire and the lake. He was sprawled out, his limbs askew with one arm tucked behind his head whilst the rest seemed to be stretched out as if they couldn’t bear to be still. Even the strange blade lying next to him was snoring with little rumbles and grumbles.

Kimimaro blinked and found himself staring at Uzu who was curled up with her knees brought up to her chest and her hands clasped just above them. Her long red hair was unbound and draped over her like a blanket. Her tabi clothed feet peeked out from the wealth of hair that continued well down her bedroll.

She too was snoring but they were whistling snores, long and high. The various snores made him want to giggle. They were all so different but blended so well.

“You are awake Little Prince. You slept long and deep.” Matatabi murmured.

Kimimaro turned his head to see the cat peering round at him. Her ears were twitching every now and again on her head, listening to their surroundings.

“When did Uzu-san get back?” Kimimaro whispered, hesitant to speak lest he wake the others.

“When did Uzu-san get back?” Kimimaro whispered, hesitant to speak lest he wake the others.

“Several hours ago. Midday has come and gone. Mother will wake soon and then we will eat before moving on.”

Kimimaro hummed and tilted his head back to stare up at the clouds that looked thick with snow. The temperature had dropped, he could feel the promise of snow nipping at his nose.

Uzu shifted beneath her hair and Kimimaro found he had been staring at the clouds longer than he had thought. He watched as the woman stretched and shifted on her bedroll and then sat up, tossing her hair over her shoulder to stream down her back.

“Good afternoon, Little Prince.” Uzu greeted him. He gave a small smile back.

Uzu reached into a pack and pulled out some strips of meat before standing up and walking over to where he and the other three were. She gently shook the shoulder of the boy sleeping on Kimimaro
before moving on to the younger children.

“Jūgo, time to wake up.” The orange haired boy blinked away suddenly and stared at Uzu with blank eyes. On his head the white cat yawned before sliding down to wrap around his neck and begin lapping at his cheek. The soft licks seemed to wake him up further and he looked at Uzu with clearer eyes.

“Did you sleep well Fledgling?” Uzu asked softly. Jūgo nodded and Uzu pressed a kiss to his forehead.

“That’s good. Have some dried beef. We’ll set off in a bit and have a proper meal this evening alright?”

Jūgo took one of the dried strips and began to much, occasionally tearing off a tiny piece and handing it to his cat.

Yugito’s head popped up from beneath the cloak and she stretched her arms up high, causing Kimimaro to have to dodge her fists.

“Oh!” Yugito chuckled weakly. “Sorry! Uzu-nee can I have something to eat?”

Uzu shook her head fondly and handing Yugito a couple of strips.

“Give one to Kimimaro too. He must be just as hungry as you.”

“Yes Uzu-nee.” Yugito chirped and thanked her for the meat. She twisted to look at Kimimaro with an excited smile.

“Here you go Kimimaro!”

He took the meat carefully, watching as Yugito devoured hers. She grinned and then gestured for him to eat his. He bit into it and his eyes widened at the flavours that burst on his tongue. It was rich and smoky with a tang of herbs too. Much better than the dried meats his clan would give him.

Uzu had returned to the boy who was still slumbering deeply against Kimimaro and was crooning to him and carding her fingers through his hair.

Yugito called out as the last member of their group woke and stood and stretched.

“Kisame! How many did you take out last night?” She asked and the man grinned with sharp teeth.

“I lost count brat. Samehada ate well though. Where did you get the food?”

Yugito grinned back and pointed to the pack which Kisame went over to and rummaged through, bringing out more meat strips and a pouch filled with something else. He strode over and plonked himself down on the ground near Matatabi’s head, giving the feline a scratch behind her ears before handing out a couple more strips of meat to Yugito and Kimimaro and chewing his own.

Jūgo was more awake and brightened when Kisame gave him the cloth pouch. He opened it and pulled out a walnut, shoving it into his mouth and humming happily.

“So, who’s the newest one? Has she given him a nickname yet?” Kisame growled.

Uzu pivoted slightly to roll her eyes at him and he grinned back laughing. Matatabi chuckled too.

“Little Prince. She gave it to him just before she went to bring you back fish boy.” Matatabi said
slyly, her tails flicking next to the still sleeping boy.

Kisame groaned but grinned.

“Little Prince huh, suits you kid. You have a royal look about you.”

“Better a prince than a fish.” Yugito chirped and Matatabi laughed.

Kimimaro looked to Uzu but the woman was shaking her head and smiling fondly.

“His name is Kimimaro.”

“Welcome to the family, Kimimaro.” Kisame said and tossed him another strip of meat.

Family huh? That sounded kind of nice. Especially if they didn’t put him in a cage again. But Uzu had said he shouldn’t have been in the cage… But what if they found out what he could do, and they hated him?

Kimimaro made a vow not to use his powers. He didn’t ever want to go in a cage again.

*

Chapter End Notes

Who’s your favourite Uzu-verse character so far? Is there anyone you’d like to see more of?

Next Chapter - Kimimaro Part Three:
Mama Uzu and the foundlings learn the consequences of Kimimaro's imprisonment.
Kimimaro feels ashamed. Mama Uzu isn't having any of it. There are hot springs and bathing.
Kimimaro - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Accidentally gave you the preview for Part Four! Here's the preview for Kimimaro Part Three:
Mama Uzu and the foundlings learn the consequences of Kimimaro's imprisonment. Kimimaro feels ashamed. Mama Uzu isn't having any of it. There are hot springs and bathing.

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kimimaro

(Part Three)

*

Once Uzu had finally managed to rouse Utakata, and the strange six-tailed slug that was sleeping on the boy’s lap, the whole group began to move swiftly and fluidly breaking their makeshift camp and readying themselves to move out.

Kimimaro was left to lean against Matatabi and finish eating his dried meat.

When the time came for him to stand up however, tension, fury and revulsion were soon displayed on their faces. Kimimaro felt his heart wince at the looks. He had really, really tried to stand. But his legs wouldn’t cooperate, his feet wouldn’t flatten out on the ground and his spine was unused to straightening.

He ducked his head and felt the burning sting of tears welling up in his eyes. His long hair knotted and greasy fell around to obscure him.

Uzu fell to her knees in front of him and snaked her hands beneath his hair to press against both his cheeks, forcefully lifting his face.

“There is nothing wrong with you.” She said earnestly. Her eyes stared into his. “You are not to blame. You should never have been kept in a cage, especially one that is too small for you to stand up and move around in.”

He bit his lower lip and tasted blood.

“Don’t hurt yourself Kimimaro.” Uzu used her thumb to pull his lip from between his teeth. “You are a wonderful, beautiful, brave boy. Don’t let this hurt you. We are not angry or disgusted with you, but with your clan.”
“That’s right.” Yugito murmured and sank down next to him, rubbing her head against him in a decidedly feline manner.

“We are going back.” Uzu announced and the others made noises or motions of agreement.

Kimimaro felt his throat tighten. Going back where? He couldn’t say it.

“Okaa-san, you need to tell Kimimaro-kun where we’re going.” Utakata said and Uzu smiled.

“So thoughtful and kind Utakata-kun.” She praised him and he smiled.

She lifted Kimimaro up into her arms, cradling him like she had before. This time however Kisame stepped forward and draped a blanket over him and adjusted his wool hat, making sure that it was firmly tucked down over his ears.

Jūgo trotted over and Kōgō leapt from his shoulder to curl up in Kimimaro’s lap, a little personal heater atop the blanket.

Kisame grabbed Jūgo and began striding off towards the east, the boy squealing slightly as he was tossed up and caught into a hold not dissimilar to how Uzu was carrying Kimimaro. Yugito grabbed Utakata’s hand and the older boy patiently let her drag him along, his strange slug riding on his shoulder and Matatabi prowling along beside them.

Uzu brought up the rear and Kimimaro felt some of his concern ebb. They were going away. Away from his clan. Away from the cage.

“We are going to return to our homeland. Have you heard of Uzushio?” Uzu began and he shook his head.

“Well, Uzushio is off the coast of the Fire Nation. It was known as the Land of Whirlpools and Eddies. I am the spirit, I suppose is the easiest construct to grasp, of Uzushio. I am the sea, earth, sky, air, rain, plants, animals, whirlpools, sands and memories of the land.”

Kimimaro settled down and listened. He had always enjoyed stories. Some of the happiest times of his life had been craning his ears to hear fragments of the tales told by his clan, even if their stories tended to be violent.

Uzu trotted along behind her children, the whole time telling him her story from start to the current situation. Kimimaro didn’t care if she was odd, if he was in the presence of Bijuu, if her adopted children were little powerhouses. They were all different, like him. Maybe, they wouldn’t hate his power? Maybe they wouldn’t want him to use it? Maybe they wouldn’t put him in a cage?

*  

As night fell Kisame stopped them next to a natural hot spring and they all wasted no time undressing and sinking into the steaming water.

Uzu helped Kimimaro pull off his old clothes and then she had dumped them on the campfire.

“I will give you better clothing.” She announced when he made to protest. “There is no need for you to wear such old and dirty clothing.”

Kimimaro flushed slightly but gave in.

“That would be nice. Thank you, Uzu-sama.” He said softly.
“Now, let’s get everyone cleaned up.” Uzu tossed a bar of soap and some cloths to Kisame who wrangled Utakata close and began scrubbing at the boy’s hair. Yugito turned her attention to Jūgo, helping the boy wash his locks before attending to her own.

Uzu, in just her breast band and underwear, lifted Kimimaro into her arms and slowly, tentatively lowered him into the water with her.

At first, he clung onto her neck ferociously as the hot water seemed to sting his flesh and his muscles tightened painfully at the shock. Uzu crooned and muttered nonsensical words to him until he relaxed enough, and she let them sink lower.

She kept him cradled in her lap, his arms looped around her neck and his head falling to rest against her collarbone. With one hand she scooped water up and trickled it down over his neck and upper back which were still clear of the water.

The water was both soothing and torturous but eventually Kimimaro relaxed enough for Uzu to guide him down to dunk his head and wet his greasy hair which she had spent a long time unknotting and detangling before they bathed.

The heat from the water was actually helping his body relax and he felt his legs straightening out and his spine unfurling slightly.

“Is it helping?” Uzu murmured.

He nodded. “It doesn’t burn anymore. I used to feel better whenever they let me bathe in warm water but that was usually a luxury.”

Uzu pursed her lips but stayed silent, massaging shampoo into his hair and letting her fingers press into his skull. His eyes closed and he moaned at the feeling. It felt so good to have someone washing his hair. He rarely had time to do more than dip it in whatever water he was allowed to bathe in. And he couldn’t remember anyone ever washing it for him.

“Kimimaro-kun’s hair is super pretty.” Yugito purred and sidled over to weave her own fingers into the length of it, leaving Uzu to massage his roots and scalp. “Can I put it up tomorrow? Or braid it?”

Uzu chuckled. “You need to ask Kimimaro.”

Yugito grinned pleadingly at him and widened her eyes, blinking rapidly. Kimimaro found himself smiling.

“That sounds nice. Thank you, Yugito-san.”

She scoffed and wrinkled her nose.

“Yugito-chan. Kimimaro-kun. I’m younger than you. Probably. Kisame, Uzu-nee and Utakata might be older but Jūgo-kun and I are the youngest out of the family. Apart from Kabuto-kun. But even though he’s young he talks like a grown-up half the time. And he’s not very good at playing. What do you like to play?”

Kimimaro winced. He didn’t know how to play either.

“Yugito-chan. You’re pestering Kimimaro-kun.” Jūgo tugged at the girl’s arm and she looked at Kimimaro who was biting his lower lip.
“Oops. Sorry Kimimaro-kun. Don’t worry, we can teach you how to play. I wasn’t very good at it when Uzu-nee found me.” She hastily reassured him and he smiled gratefully.

“That would be nice Yugito-chan. I’d like to learn how to play.”

“Need to rinse out the shampoo.” Uzu warned and guided him down beneath the water then lifted him up so his face was above the surface but her other hand could work the soap out into the water.

Kimimaro stared up through the steam at the stars that were twinkling over head as the sky turned black. Night was truly upon them.

Kisame escorted the younger children out of the hot spring, bundling them up in towels and settling them down next to Matatabi and Saiken who had been watching the pot of rice and stirring it occasionally (Saiken’s tails were surprisingly adept at grasping a spoon).

Uzu worked out every morsel of shampoo before sitting Kimimaro back up against her and lathering his now dirt-free with a thicker substance. He didn’t complain at all at the treatment but nuzzled against her collar bone and breathed in her scent. She smelt like salt and sakura blossoms and wind. It was a heady mixture.

“We’ll let that sit in your hair for a few moments. Are you happy to wash yourself? I can do your back.” Uzu offered and he nodded, accepting the soapy cloth she offered him and began to clean his body.

It was nice to slough off the dirt, sweat and general unpleasantness that had lingered on his skin. Uzu attended her own hair and body whilst he did so. He was finished long before she had finished rinsing out her hair but waited patiently.

“Why is your hair so long?” He asked when she was finally done.

She shrugged and took his washcloth, rubbing it with a soap bar and working up another lather. Her hands gently rubbed along his bent spine and massaged the soap in as carefully as she had with his hair.

The pressure of her hands on his back made his muscles ease further. She seemed to realise this and once finished took his arm in her hands and massaged gently from his shoulder down to his fingers.

“I made myself. I chose what I wanted the different parts of me to look like. I always thought Uzumaki hair was beautiful so I chose the same colour. One of my children, Kushina, she had long red hair so I wanted to have long hair too. I just made mine a bit longer.” She responded.

“But it’s so long that you can step on it.” Kimimaro retorted with a confused frown. “That isn’t practical in battle.”

“I’m not a shinobi.” She replied.

“But you’ve been involved in fights.”

“But I’ve never had my hair grabbed. I made sure I’m quicker and out of my enemies reach. If I know I’m going to be involved in fighting, then I braid and pin it up to make it harder to be used against me.”

“Can I grow my hair as long as yours?” Kimimaro asked. He kind of liked the idea. Especially if Yugito said it was beautiful. He’d like to have a part of him that was beautiful. Unlike his power.
“If you want. It'll take many years to reach my length.” Uzu said.

Kimimaro grinned.

“That’s okay. I think it’ll be fun to see it grow.”

Uzu chuckled and scooped up water to rinse off his arms and backs. She had massaged all his limbs and he felt looser and less tight than he had in years.

“Better?” She asked and he nodded. “When we get to Uzushio I’m going to ask Tsunade-chan and Shizune-chan to give you a medical check-up.”

Kimimaro stiffened.

“I think they can probably help you better than I can with just massages.” Uzu explained. “They might be able to correct the wastage of your muscles and the bend in your spine.”

Kimimaro didn’t know if he wanted a medical check-up. If they were looking at his bones they might see. He didn’t know if his bones were different. They had to be different if they could do what they did.

“Well, we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” Uzu murmured but she could see he was worried.

“Anyway, I think it’s time for us to get out and dried off so we can have some dinner.” She spoke deliberately lighter and cheerily.

*

Kimimaro stayed quiet for the rest of the evening and when he laid down on the bedroll with Utakata he looked up at the stars twinkling overhead.

Would they see? Would they know?

*

Chapter End Notes

I'm not a medical professional so don't judge me on medical practices. I research but at the same time I'm not going to spend hours learning about muscle atrophy and wastage on war victims etc. I love this fic, but not enough to read gnarly accounts of unfair imprisonment.

Next Chapter - Kimimaro Part Four: We're back on Uzushio. Kimimaro delights in a nightingale floor. Tsunade manages to scare our Little Prince half to death. Kimimaro reveals his secret.
Kimimaro - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Kimimaro Part Four: We're back on Uzushio. Kimimaro delights in a nightingale floor. Tsunade manages to scare our Little Prince half to death. Kimimaro reveals his secret.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the bookmarks, subscriptions, kudos and comments! Nearly at 300 kudos so you know what that means, double update when we get there!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kimimaro

(Part Four)

*

Kimimaro was terrified. He could feel his heart racing and his chest felt tight. His bones were aching they way they usually did when they were about to burst from his body. He was only able to keep them from doing so because Uzu-san was cradling him in her lap and stroking his back.

He didn’t want to hurt her. He didn’t want to hurt anyone. He didn’t want them to see. He didn’t want to be trapped again.

*

Uzu and Matatabi carried him all the way to Uzushio. They took it in turns but Kimimaro secretly preferred when Uzu carried him. She would talk to him and call him Little Prince and he was so happy to be in the free air.

Winter was falling and the snow followed them as they headed south east, avoiding the war zone as much as possible and skirting around the edge of Fire country.

Whenever possible they stopped at onsen or natural hot springs and soaked. The warm water did wonders for his muscles and spine. The others never seemed to mind that Uzu was leading them on a rather windy and tedious journey, literally planning their route to coincide with hot springs. Kimimaro felt guilty at first but Utakata and Jugo reassured him that Uzu usually seemed to wander around aimlessly and that this was the most planned route they’d ever actually had.

When they finally reached Uzushio, winter had raced on ahead and covered the island with snow. Kimimaro didn’t think he’d seen anything more glorious before than a snow covered island bursting out of the fog bank.

All the island was coated in snow, even the beaches although wherever anyone walked and lifted
the snow away there were red footprints left behind. It should have looked macabre, like bloody trails, but instead there was a bittersweet contrast between the purity of the snow and the strong, bold red soil and sand.

“It’s so pretty!” Yugito squealed and flung herself onto the snow, spreading her arms and legs and making a mess of herself. Jugo joined in with a giggle but Kōgō leapt to ride on Kisame’s shoulder, his height putting her far away from the snow.

“Okaa-san!” A young voice called and Kimimaro watched as a boy hurtled down to the beach and slammed into Uzu’s legs. She didn’t stagger despite the ferocity of his hit but laughed and tightened her arms around Kimimaro being careful not to drop him.

“Did you miss me Kabuto-kun?” She sang. Kabuto nuzzled his face into her cloak and mumbled incoherently.

Kisame scoffed and shook his head with a wry smile on his face before leaning over and lifting Kimimaro from Uzu, letting her pick up Kabuto. The youngest child hummed happily and wrapped his arms around her neck, burrowing into her neck and whispering in her ear.

“Well I missed you. And so, did everyone else. Yahiko said he hopes you’re looking after Genbu-chan.”

“I am. I’m looking after her and Tsunade-oba-chan and Shizune-nee. Tsunade-oba-chan caught a cold and Shizune-nee caught it from looking after her.” Kabuto said. “Okaa-san, why did Hotaru-san say that only idiots catch colds?”

Uzu laughed but her brow furrowed. “I’m afraid there are some aspects of humanity I don’t understand. Irony and humour elude me, but I’m pretty sure Hotaru-san was calling Tsunade-chan and Shizune-chan idiots.”

Kabuto wrinkled his nose.

“That doesn’t make sense. They’re both really clever.”

“Keh. Don’t worry about it kid. I’m sure the old bat and princess will get better soon. I’ll cook up some chicken soup. That should help.” Kisame held Kimimaro in one arm easily and reached over to ruffle Kabuto’s silver hair.

Kimimaro smiled as the boy scowled and pulled his head away.

“Come along children, Tsunade-chan and Shizune-chan will feel better if you give them lots of hugs.” Uzu said. The two who had been rolling around in the snow had managed to drag Utakata down and they all sat up in various states of dishevelment.

Kabuto wriggled in Uzu’s arms, silently demanding to be put down and the second he was upright Yugito and Utakata were drawing him into their own embrace. Jugo was more uncertain and Uzu smiled as he sidled over to her side and reached for her hand. She squeezed his and murmured down to him. A small smile spread on his face and he smiled shyly at Kabuto when the younger boy introduced himself.

Uzu led the way with the younger children racing around and ahead but stopping and waiting for Uzu and Kisame to catch up. The villagers greeted them as they moved through the streets. They were all wrapped up in scarves, hats and thick winter coats but were cheery in spite of the blanket of snow and the chilly bite in the air.
“Keh, looks like the old bat’s nearly finished.” Kisame said approvingly when they reached a house furthest from the beach entrance, nestled up against the side of the mountain that dominated the Uzushio skyline.

Kimimaro couldn’t remember seeing a bigger house. It sprawled out with several wings and enclosed courtyards. Most of the building was only one floor but a couple of the furthest wings had a second floor.

The floor chirped and the younger children ran back and forth over it, giggling as it sang. Kimimaro felt a pang of jealousy. He wanted to make the floor sing.

Uzu noticed his face fall and took him from Kisame’s arms, indicating for him to continue on and begin seeing what provisions they had in the kitchen. The younger children scurried after him clamouring for snacks.

“Do you want to stand?” Uzu asked Kimimaro. He bit his lower lip and nodded. Uzu knelt down on the floor and carefully slipped her arm away from below his legs, letting his feet fall to lay on the floor. Her arms went around his waist and his hands to her shoulders. He felt the fabric of her robes bunch within his hands that fisted as he breathed and forced his legs and feet to take his weight.

“That’s it. You’re doing so well.” Uzu crooned. He wasn’t standing tall or straight by any definition but Kimimaro felt a swell of pride. A few weeks ago, and he wouldn’t have been able to do anything but crawl or drag himself across such a floor.

Uzu shuffled backwards a few inches but Kimimaro didn’t panic and carefully lifted one foot slightly and stepped forward. A smile broke out on his face as the floorboard took his weight and chirped, just like a bird.

They continued in their ungainly way but Kimimaro didn’t care. He was just delighted with the simple pleasure of making the floorboards sing. Eventually his muscles protested.

“I need to stop Uzu-san.” He panted and she smiled, taking his weight as he fell forward into her body. His head rested on her shoulder and he felt her swing his legs round to rest over her lap.

“You did so well Kimimaro.” She stroked his long hair back and tucked it behind his ear to press a kiss on his cheek. “You should be really proud.”

“Seems like you’ve acquired more brats.” A woman’s sniffly voice said.

Kimimaro tensed and peeked up at the blanket swaddled blonde who was blowing her nose loudly into a handkerchief.

“Tsunade-chan. I heard you were unwell.” Uzu commented but didn’t move off the floor.

Tsunade sighed disgustedly. “Yeah, there’s a flu going round. Is Kisame cooking?”

She looked hopefully down the hall towards where the sound of the younger children was emanating.

Uzu chuckled. “Yes. He’s going to make chicken soup. And probably rice porridge too. But before we go and see what he’s doing let me introduce you to Kimimaro. Kimimaro-kun, this is Tsunade-sama. She’s the healer I told you about.”

Kimimaro watched warily as Tsunade knelt down and reached out with her hand to shake his. A
green glow covered her hand and he felt his body stiffen. Terror coursed through him. He wasn’t ready. He didn’t know yet if she would see.

He watched that green-chakra coated hand stop but couldn’t tear his eyes away from it.

“Easy, kid. I’m not going to hurt you.” Tsunade said.

“Kimimaro, breathe in, hold it and then out. Again. Slowly.” Uzu murmured and ran her hand up and down his curved spine.

They stayed that way for a long time, the chakra on Tsunade’s hand settling down but not disappearing.

“What made you so frightened Kimimaro-kun?” Uzu asked softly.

“I-I’m a monster.” He whispered.

Tsunade snorted. “Kid, if you’re a monster then you’re the most frightened monster I’ve ever met.”

Uzu winced and shook her head at Tsunade who scowled and shucked her blanket up around her shoulders again.

“What makes you say you’re a monster?”

Kimimaro licked his dry lips. “My bones. They come out of me. And then they regrow inside me. The ones that come out are sharp. Sometimes they come out without me telling them to. My clan were frightened of me. They said I was a monster.”

Tsunade wrinkled her nose. “Kekkai genkai?”

“I don’t know.” Uzu replied. “But just because you have, admittedly, unusual abilities does not make you a monster. Were you afraid Tsunade-chan would see that your bones are different?”

Kimimaro nodded. “My bones aren’t like other peoples. The medic in my clan said they changed. I was afraid Tsunade-sama would find out and be scared. They wanted me to use them to fight.”

“Well there’s no way Uzu-sama would make you do that.” Tsunade said authoritatively. Kimimaro stared at the confident expression on the woman’s face. There was utter surety and conviction in her face and voice. No hint of a lie or disbelief.

Kimimaro turned to look at Uzu who wasn’t smiling but watching him carefully.

“Really?” He whispered.

“No. The only reason I might ask you to use your powers would be to show Tsunade-chan so that she can see if they might be impacting your health.” Uzu said. “Other than that I would never ask or expect you to use your powers.”

Kimimaro held out his hand and pushed a bone up through his palm. The skin broke where the sharp point erupted and blood welled around the bone. Tsunade gagged and looked away. He reached over and snapped the shard off, tossing it onto the floor with a clatter.

Uzu tutted and pressed her hand against the wound.

“Does that hurt? When your bones come through your skin?”
Kimimaro stared at her. No one had ever asked him that. No one had ever considered that it hurt him to push his bones through his skin even when they saw that it made him bleed.

“Yes. Every single time.”

“Then you definitely shouldn’t do it anymore, unless you want to.” Uzu commanded and pulled a handkerchief from a sleeve, wrapping his hand with it. It wasn’t really necessary anymore, the blood had already stopped and the wound closed up, but Kimimaro didn’t protest. It felt – good. Good to have someone concerned and worried about his ability causing him pain and worried about the aftereffects.

“Is it covered up?” Tsunade panted. Uzu made an affirmative noise and the woman turned to look at the bone on the floor, carefully picking it up in one hand. Her thumb rubbed along the sharp edge and she whistled astonished.

“This is as sharp as metal, maybe sharper. But it doesn’t feel the same as your traditional human bone. It feels denser and yet lighter… Hmm.”

“Can you fix me?” Kimimaro asked her.

Tsunade looked up at him for the first time since he had pushed his bone out.

“Kid, you don’t need fixing. There’s nothing wrong with what you can do. But I can guess that your muscles and spine have been impacted by a poor diet and not being allowed to move freely.”

Uzu nodded, confirming her suspicions.

“Well, that neglect I can fix. We’ll have you running about in the snow in a few weeks.”

Kimimaro’s mouth opened. He didn’t think she would offer it so freely.

“Really?”

“I’m Tsunade Senju, Legendary Sannin and the greatest healer since Hashirama. It’s a promise.”

* 

Chapter End Notes

Again, I'm not a medical professional. Besides Tsunade is the most badass healer since Hashirama so she can do whatever I want. Lol.

Next Chapter - Interlude Four (Winter):
Tsunade is a badass. Kimimaro learns a skill. Saiken creates new ways to have fun.
The first baby to be born on Uzushio since the Fall is named.
**Interlude Four - Winter**

Chapter Summary

Interlude Four (Winter):
Tsunade is a badass. Kimimaro learns a skill. Saiken creates new ways to have fun.
The first baby to be born on Uzushio since the Fall is named.

Chapter Notes

305 kudos so you all know what that means - double update! So you're getting Interlude Four Winter and Han - Part One tonight (18.07).

Thanks for all the bookmarks, subscriptions, kudos and comments! Each is greatly appreciated especially as I never thought this story would grow so much and go on so long, nor that anyone would be enjoying it!

Onward to the Interlude!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Interlude Four**

(Winter)

* 

Tsunade kept her promise. Together with Shizune-nee she performed several treatments and operations and straightened out Kimimaro’s spine and strengthened his muscles. After the last surgery he was placed on bed rest and given lots of meals with vitamins and nutrients to strengthen and heal him.

Kisame made it his own personal mission to make the highest quality and most beneficial meals. It became a point of pride (but was also his way of showing his concern). Yugito and Jūgo spent part of their time sitting with Kimimaro – reluctant to go out and play and train when their newest sibling couldn’t join them. Instead they started teaching him how to play with cards, board games and word games. Utakata would always settle down with Kimimaro after one of the pale-haired boy’s physical therapy sessions for a nap. If he wiped away tears of frustration and pain, well – it was their secret.

Uzu knew Kimimaro was growing frustrated and so she invited an Obake descendent over and the three of them began to build a wardrobe of different clothing items for Kimimaro. Ones that would be suitable for him as he had been mainly sharing the kimonos, trousers and shirts that Utakata preferred.

They discovered that Kimimaro was skilled at pairing colours and materials. He had a natural appreciation for colour and beauty. He also seemed to have an interest in clothing, particularly in
how the Obake had woven Uzumaki designed seals into their clothing. Utakata gained a sealing partner and Uzu arranged for Kimimaro to learn how to make clothing. The process seemed to excite the boy as much as the prospect of walking.

Tsunade and Shizune carefully monitored his progress and, when the snow was at its deepest and heaviest and still falling in puffy white flakes, declared him ready to walk without assistance.

When he could finally take those first independent steps (with the aid of Uzu and Tsunade’s hands hovering nearby) he wept. All the other children were watching on the engawa as he made his way, stumbling and slowly over the nightingale floor, cheering and praising him on.

They had a veritable feast for dinner that night and Kimimaro looked around his new family and felt his heart settle. Utter and complete acceptance was something he had never believed possible and yet, here he was.

“Thank you.” He murmured to Uzu who was sat next to him. She stroked her hand down the waterfall of his hair that lay against his now straight spine. She didn’t say anything. She didn’t need to.

* 

Saiken materialised and burbled excitedly to all the tiny squishies bundled up in their layers standing off to the side.

“Are you ready?” he asked and they cheered.

He prepared his new slime, mixing it and his chakra together being careful to get the perfect balance of chakra and mucus. He held it in his mouth and then spewed it out. It rushed from his mouth and splattered onto the ground.

His eyestalks waved and he peered at his new slime. It was working! He could see it when it hit the ground!

More and more of it poured from his mouth until he had made a veritable lake of it. The last few drops had to be pushed more forcefully from his mouth and he flapped his lips to shake the taste. It wasn’t his tastiest slime but hopefully it might be his most fun.

“All done!” He shouted and waggled his tails. Utakata looked up at him and then down at the pool of slime.

“So what’s special about this slime?” His Jinchūriki asked.

“Run on it, without chakra. Just your bare feet!” Saiken advised and held back the urge to jump up and down on the spot. Utakata stared at him before sighing and reaching down to pull his winter boots off.

He breathed in deeply (Saiken did too, crossing his tails behind his back just in case it didn’t work how it was supposed to) and then charged across the deep pool of slime.

To his surprise he didn’t sink into the liquid but instead it became firm beneath his feet, supporting his weight before changing back into a liquid.

“What in the -?!” He yelped as he started to sink once he stopped moving. Jūgo cheered from the side as the older boy made it across the solid liquid and the other children joined in.
Utakata laughed and panted. He braced himself against Saiken and the Rokubi giggled along too.

“It’s good isn’t it Uta-kun?! It’s a liquid and a solid!” Saiken blew bubbles from his mouth in his euphoria and the younger children leapt and tried to catch them. Some of them had already removed their footwear and were running on the strange new slime, shrieking when they began to sink.

Utakata shook his hair from his eyes and grinned at Saiken.

“It’s amazing Saiken! How does it work?”

“Well, when you put pressure on it, it becomes solid. The more pressure the firmer it becomes. I thought it would be fun for the tiny squishies to play with but in combat we could use it to surprise opponents. You know adults would pull and pull. It could be good to slow down and confuse.” The slug explained and waved his eyestalks when Utakata patted him.

“Excellent thinking!” Utakata grinned before leaping back out onto the slime pool and chasing after Yugito who was running on all fours across the solid-liquid lake.

Saiken preened. Not only had he made a cool new slime, but he had made the tiny squishies happy. He watched them play and wondered what other slimes and bubbles he could make. After all, keeping the tiny squishies happy was his favourite hobby.

* 

Hotaru and Kenji, who had been part of the first group to return to Uzushio gave birth that winter. A healthy, fat, baby boy. Uzu and her family were invited to his naming ceremony. A surprising amount of her foundlings had never seen a new born baby before.

“Are they always so squishy looking?” Utakata asked. Uzu winced but Hotaru laughed loudly. Her aunt, a weathered but grinning shinobi laughed just as loudly. Her young girl Mao winced at her mother’s raucous behaviour.

“Mao was just as squishy looking. So was Hotaru-chan when she was born.” Yoko-san said. “I think it is a new-born baby thing.”

Utakata shrugged. “Saiken wanted to know. But then again, he thinks we all look squishy. I’ve said he’s the squishiest, but he said we’re more fragile squishies than him.”

Yoko erupted into laughter again and her daughter slapped her forehead with her palm.


Uzu held out her arms to accept the baby that Hotaru was proffering. Her arms easily took the small child, holding him perfectly and close to her body. He had been grumbling and shifting within his blankets but once pressed against Uzu he fell silent and his eyes widened.

“He recognises you Uzu-sama.” Hotaru said pleased. “I had hoped he would have the same connection that all Uzushio born people have.”

“That’s cool.” Yugito whispered as she stroked a gentle finger over the baby’s fuzzy red hair. “He’ll always be a part of you too Uzu-nee.”

Uzu sank down onto the floor to allow all her children to come and greet the baby. Jügo and Kimimaro were a bit more hesitant but soon joined in when Hotaru prompted them with a wide
grin – her bold Uzumaki nature and confidence in Uzu reassuring the two boys greatly.

“What’s his name Hotaru-san?” Jūgo asked as he peered at the boy’s blue eyes.

Hotaru exchanged besotted looks with her husband Kenji. The mochi maker rubbed his nose bashfully before answering.

“Daichi, grand first son. Well, we thought it fitting Uzu-sama, what with him being the first baby born back on Uzushio. Do you – do you approve?” Kenji held hands with Hotaru and both parents peered at Uzu with hopeful expressions.

Yugito watched as a bitterly sweet tender smile formed on Uzu’s face. She looked both sad and happy. Inside her she felt Matatabi purr reassuringly but also heard her whimper slightly at the sorrow and love her mother was showing.

“Daichi is a perfect name. First born son of Kenji and Hotaru, child of Uzushio.” Uzu crooned and pressed a kiss to the baby’s forehead.

Tsunade took Daichi from Uzu’s arms to greet him herself and Kabuto – being the youngest and smallest – scrambled his way into Uzu’s now empty arms. They had all seen the sadness and happiness warring in Uzu and filling her gaze, arms and thoughts with them seemed the best option to fend off her grief (even if only for a little bit).

“Are you going to have a baby Okaa-san?” Kabuto asked.

“We didn’t equip this body with eggs. We left reproduction to our soul which remains in and of Uzushio’s land, air and water. Besides,” She blew air on Kabuto’s still round with youth cheek and made him giggle. “I have all of you. And I suspect there will be more of you to find and bring into our family.”

Kisame groaned. “You don’t need more brats.”

“Who says they’ll be young?” Kimimaro pointed out. “Okaa-san adopted Tsunade-oba-chan and she’s older than you.”

“The old hag doesn’t count.” Kisame protested. He froze and a shiver ran up his spine. “She’s right behind me, isn’t she?”

Jūgo giggled and clenched his hand on Utakata’s kimono sleeve. All of the younglings watched as Tsunade cracked her knuckles one at a time. Each crack made Kisame wince.

“Who’re you calling old and a hag?” Tsunade inquired in a devastatingly sweet voice. There was a forced smile on her face and the corner of her mouth was twitching.

Kisame found some reserve of bravado and seemed to lose all common sense.

“You know exactly who I’m calling an old hag, you old hag. Are you going deaf in your dotage?”

Tsunade bellowed and the teen bolted. He leapt over the table spread with baby gifts, knocking a few to the floor as he fled. Tsunade was hot on his heels and they soon disappeared out the room.

Yoko and Mao were frozen to the spot as a loud crash and the sound of breaking glass came from the hallway accompanied by a yelp. Uzu bit her lower lip.

“My apologies Hotaru-chan, Kenji-kun. It seems my children have forgotten their manners.” She
apologised.

Yoko grinned and grabbed her naginata from the wall where she had been forced to leave it.

“Hotaru-chan, not that it hasn’t been fun meeting my great-nephew but I’m gonna go join in the fun outside!”

Hotaru laughed as her aunt whooped and chased after Tsunade and Kisame. They all heard the front door sliding open and a howl from Kisame and a yelp from Tsunade. There was a war cry which Uzu could recall a much younger Yoko making before the sound was cut off by the door shutting.

“Are naming ceremonies on Uzushio always like this?” Kenji asked and bounced a fussing Daichi in his arms.

Uzu shook her head but smiled.

“I blame the Uzumaki blood. They’ve always been slightly crazy, and always eager to join in or start a fight.”

Hotaru grinned and wrapped an arm around her cousin who was groaning once again at her mother’s dramatics.

“And we’re proud of it. Besides, your family is the same Uzu-sama.”

Uzu looked down and around at the remaining members of her little family who were boisterously arguing over whom would win the fight and shrugged her shoulders.

“I wouldn’t have them any other way.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Daichi – Impressive or grand first son

So Saiken's newest slime is inspired by Ooblek which is like my favourite thing ever (okay not that much but it's still pretty amazing!). Ooblek is a Non-Newtonian liquid which basically means that it is a liquid that acts like a solid when force is applied. You make it out of cornstarch and water. FYI you cannot put it down a drain/toilet/pipe you have to throw it in the bin. Go check out videos of people running on pools of it, it is seriously awesome. (and who said fanfiction couldn't be educational!)

If you're confused about Yoko and Mao they are OC's whose story is in 'Glory' one of the side stories to ITAV. Check it out if you want more detail on them.

Next Chapter - Han Part One
No synopsis, just go read as soon as I've posted it!
Han - Part One

Chapter Summary

Han - Part One:

We learn about Han’s past and how he became a rogue nin. We find out he's been hiding in the coldest place possible and he ends up being a knight in red armour.

Chapter Notes

Double update! Make sure you've read Interlude Four - Winter before you read Han Part One!

Read it? Read onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Han

(Part One)

*  

For all his size, strength and speed, Han was a pacifist at heart. He didn’t enjoy the shinobi lifestyle that had been forced upon him from a young age. He didn’t like hurting other people. He was good at it, partially due to Kokuō, but that didn’t mean he had to like it.

Kokuō had told him about her former Jinchūriki. A mean woman who enjoyed hurting others and would try to use Kokuō’s power to inflict massive amounts of damage, destruction and pain. Kokuō had refused to let the woman use her. That Jinchūriki had slowly gone mad and when she finally snapped and had to be put down, Han was the only child with anywhere near enough chakra available to contain the Gobi.

Han had grown frustrated with how Iwagakure treated him. His protests about being forced repeatedly onto the battlefield to fight Iwa’s enemies fell on deaf ears. Having finally had enough, he fled after a fight between Iwa and Konoha shinobi. The opportunity to escape was presented when the Konoha nin fled and his supposed comrades pursued them with vicious intent.

A burst of steam and he was thundering through the landscape in the opposite direction. After that it was fairly easy to escape. He left the battlefield far behind and avoided all other fighting and clashes with great suspicion.

Once away from the great nations and in the smaller nations to the north which had avoided the warring Han relaxed somewhat. The Land of Snow was the perfect place to hide out. Wild, empty vast plains blanketed in snow were unwelcoming to many and deterred all but the most desperate or most vicious bounty hunters.
The village Han had settled on the outskirts of was full of people similar to him, hiding from their pasts. He liked it because they didn’t ask questions. He could get work cutting ice to be shipped to the other nations. He was well received because of his strength but his work mates didn’t really speak to him.

It was a simple life but it pleased Han. It was almost normal.

*  

Han peered out into the snowstorm that was raging beyond the window of his cabin. It was the fiercest one of the year so far. He shivered slightly and was grateful to his kekkai genkai that gave him steam power. It was far too cold to be out.

His kettle whistled on the stove and he eagerly poured out hot water into his coffee cup, stirring and sniffing the steaming brew. Coffee was like gold up in Yuki no Kuni. It was one of the most expensive products along with rice, tea and fresh vegetables. The only thing more expensive were spices. But he liked his food fairly plain, so he never spent his hard earnt (but clean) money on such frivolous items.

Settling into his oversized armchair and moaning gratefully at the plush cushions Han settled his coffee on the side table and picked up his book. Reading was one of the only activities available when you lived alone, and the TV didn’t even work half the time. The signal was feeble at the best of times and so Han had grown used to the quiet and stillness.

Luckily a couple of villages over, nearer Yukigakure, there was a bookshop and Han had been there only recently and spent almost too much of his budget on several new books. Titles he had always wanted to read but had never been allowed when he lived under Tsuchikage’s thumb.

This new story was about a prince who was exploring the stars. It was a sweet, solemn story. He liked it a lot, even if the bookseller had said it was intended for children.

Han was just sinking into the story, immersing his mind in it when there was a flare of chakra from out in the snowstorm. It was a huge mass, too big for a human and greater than any shinobi Han had ever fought or met (except maybe the Tsuchikage).

He bolted his feet and rushed to the window. He squinted out but couldn’t see anything but the darkness and the driving snow. His breath seemed held in his throat. He waited.

Again, the chakra flared. Seemingly as strong as before. To go or not to go… It didn’t seem like there was a fight. There was only one chakra flaring that he could sense.

His sense of honour warred with his desire to remain undiscovered. Han blew frustratedly through his nostrils before pulling on his armour once more.

The wind howled and snatched at the door the second he opened it. It was a struggle to close it once again and he bemoaned the loss of heat that had flooded out from his cabin. But he couldn’t leave someone out to die in the snow. Not when he could leave the warmth and bring them back with only a little difficulty.

His snow goggles kept his eyes clear from the wind and snow and his kasa allowed him to pierce through the wind and cold.

“Hello?” He called out, barely audible above the storm. “Is there anyone out there?”

There was a muffled reply and he turned in the direction it had emanated from.
“Hello?” He shouted again and his heart thudded when there was a distinctly human reply.

“Over here!”

A burst of steam and he was moving again, the snow hissing as it melted against his warm armour and body. A mound of unnaturally round snow sprang up out of the storm and he skidded to a halt in front of it. He drew back his fist and with steam hissing from the cracks in his armour drove his fist into the pile.

It melted and seemed to crack, revealing a chakra barrier. The golden light that the barrier emanated was forming a dome and within it, Han could see several huddled figures. There was a division down the centre and four people were on one side and two nestled as far away from the others as possible.

The chakra flared again, and Han could see a woman rocking a child in her arms, stroking his hair and her mouth moving rapidly. The chakra was large, powerful. So powerful that were he not a Jinchūriki he would have fled.

“Do you require assistance?” Han bellowed and the largest of all the figures stood within the dome. The man wasn’t as tall as Han but he was still rather tall. Two children were in his arms, bundled up in furs and a third was clinging to his side.

“Yes! Our brother is unwell. We were trying to make it to the nearest settlement when the snowstorm sprang up out of nowhere.” The man shouted.

Han gestured to the chakra barrier. “Well you can come to my hut. As long as your companion isn’t going to blow it up with all the chakra they’re pushing out.”

The man spoke to the woman and Han strained to make out what they were saying. Unfortunately, the screaming wind was too loud for the hushed tones within the barrier.

“We gratefully accept.” The man replied and the barrier dropped almost instantly. Han wasted no time and scooped up the third child that had been clinging to the other man’s side. The child was light compared to all the ice he had been shifting and he tucked them easily up against his chest plate.

“Stay close behind me!” Han bellowed. “Follow in my footprints or you’ll get lost!”

The man nodded and readjusted his two passengers and then nodded to the woman who was clutching the sick child in her arms. She slipped in behind Han and the moment all three adults were in position he set off.

The snowstorm seemed to have grown in ferocity, but Han also thought that might be his imagination.

He didn’t waste words calling out to his new companions but focussed on the feeling of his cabin and his chakra wards that he had placed around it.

Seeing the glow from the firelight through the window was a welcome sight and he would’ve used his steam to get there quicker if not for the two adults following on his tail. But nothing compared to stepping into the warmth that had built up again in his absence.

They all tumbled straight in the doorway, snow and wind whistling in with them (Han wondered how long it would take to mop up the water from all the snow that would inevitably melt). He stamped his feet near the doorway and shook the snow off the child he had carried and his own
shoulders and hat.

“You can bring the children close to the fire.” He rumbled and deposited his own passenger down on the rug. The man took his two furry bundles and knelt with them on the rug to shuck off their snow thick cloaks.

Han pulled the curtain back from his bed and gestured to the soft mattress piled high with blankets.

“The sick one can use my bed.”

“Thank you.” The woman said gratefully and readjusted the lanky child in her arms.

“Do you – do you need a hand?” Han offered warily. He knew that sometimes his size and appearance was intimidating. But seeing the woman struggle with a sick child was uncomfortable.

“If you could help me remove his cloak and shoes?” She said gratefully. Han nodded once and took the boy, bending slightly to let her untie the cloak and the boy’s boats, letting her tug the layers from him and deposit them by the door.

The revealed boy was a sweaty hot mass of flesh and gangly limbs. Fever dreams making him smell of sickness and discomfort.

The woman turned back the blankets and Han carefully laid the child in the bed. The woman divested her own cloak and shoes as he did so and when he turned to see what she wanted to do next he was surprised at the bright clothing that greeted him, luxurious compared to the usual Yuki residents. Bright red sashinuki, a deep blue (almost black) suikan and thick tabi all made of luxurious and warm materials.

Her hair was braided, pinned and coiled onto her head and flowing down her back in a thick tail. She scrambled past him onto his large bed, curling her body against the boy’s.

“Alright, Saiken. I think it might be better if you come out for a bit. I’m going to suppress some of his chakra so that he isn’t going to draw on yours as much.”

“Are you sure that’s the best idea?” The man accompanying her had divested the children of their outer garments and Han spared a glance for the worried huddle of small people on his rug. They were all peering at the man leaning over the bed and talking to their mother. Or at least Han assumed she was their mother, although none of them looked related at first glance.

“We are in the company of a stranger, Uzu.” The man flicked his eyes to Han and Han stepped away from the bed holding his hands up.

“Look, you’re in trouble, you’ve got a sick kid. I’m not going to do anything to you. It would be dishonourable.”

“Keh, says the guy living in the middle of nowhere in Yuki.” The other man said with heavy sarcasm.

“Kisame.” The woman scolded. “We don’t need to worry. Saïken come out please.”

Han leapt as a six-tailed slug the size of a sheep materialised by his bed. The six tails waggled in the air and the slug’s eyestalks peered anxiously at the boy who was being covered in blankets by the woman.

“What in the name of the Sage of the Six Paths?” Han moaned. “Why is there a six-tailed slug?”
“Saiken isn’t a slug!” The not a slug protested. “I’m a Bijuu!”

*

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Yuki no Kuni – Land of Snow

Yukigakure – Village Hidden in the Snow

Kasa – a conical hat (usually made of straw), Han’s is the same as the one from canon which appears to be made of the same material as his armour

Uzu is wearing clothing similar to Inuyasha’s fire rat robes and trousers from the anime series of the same title. She wouldn’t wear her long junihitoe when travelling in the Land of Snow after all!

Sashinuki – a type of hakama meant to be worn blousing over the leg and exposing the foot. They are longer than normal hakama and a cord is run through the hem and drawn tight around the ankle – creating a “ballooning effect”.

Suikan – a more formal piece of Japanese clothing, a type of over-robe. It has very large sleeves that are only attached for a few inches behind the shoulder.

Tabi – traditional Japanese socks worn with thonged footwear.

Next Chapter - Han Part Two: Han feeds his guests. He thinks some thoughts. We find out what's under his kasa. He and Kokuo have a chat that doesn't go great.
**Han - Part Two**

Chapter Summary

Han Part Two: Han feeds his guests. He thinks some thoughts. We find out what's under his kasa. He and Kokuo have a chat that doesn't go great.

Chapter Notes

So... Chapter 50.... Not going to lie, I didn't think I'd make it this far before loosing interest and wrapping it all up very quickly and not doing the things I had planned. But so far my interest has yet to wane and the creativity hasn't fled yet! This is probably because you guys are all so amazing bookmarking, subscribing, giving kudos and commenting! It really does have an impact and I value every one of you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Han

(Part Two)*

“And there goes any hope of keeping that a secret.” Kisame threw his hands up and looked at the ceiling in despair. “Are we gonna have to wipe this guy’s mind now?”

Han shifted. Mind wiping?

The woman shook her head. “That won’t be necessary. After all, I don’t think Kokuō would appreciate us messing around with her Jinchūriki.”

The girl on the rug sprang up and grabbed Han’s hand. He resisted the urge to shake her off. It had been a long time since someone touched him. A long, long time.

“You’re a Jinchūriki?! Which Biju do you have?” She squealed and bounced around, tugging on his hand.

“Yougito, just because you and Utakata are friendly doesn’t mean all Jinchūriki are.” The white-haired boy pulled her back down to the rug and settled her next to him. The small orange-haired boy nestled against the girl, causing her to pout.

Han looked at the woman who was cuddling the boy on the bed (Utakata his mind supplied). He was suspicious and wanted to leave. But there was a snowstorm outside. and this was his cabin he reasoned. He should make them leave. But they were children. If he could have, he would have whined in frustration. As it was, he settled for the more rational option.

“What makes you think I’m a Jinchūriki?” He asked.
Kisame snorted and shook his head as he hung up all their snow-soaked cloaks and arranged their shoes to dry near the door.

“She’s going to do it again. Although this one doesn’t seem like a brat.” The man muttered to himself.

The children by the fire were snickering. Han ignored them.

“I know my children.” Uzu said and fixed him with a blue eye from over Utakata’s head. “I know where all the Bijuu are because they were born on me.”

Han frowned. “Born on you?”

“Nee-san is Uzushio, the island and sea. The Bijuu were all born on her long, long ago.” Yugito explained with accompanying arm and hand gestures. “They were born from the Sage of Six Paths and they were born on Uzushio.”

“Huh.” Han said. He turned to his kettle and filled it with water from the bucket he had filled early with snow. That was one of the nice things about living in a land covered in frozen water – easy access to the liquid as long as you had enough heat to melt and boil it. He methodically pulled out bowls and chopsticks and packets of instant ramen.

He wasn’t thinking about the possibility that he had an island in his house and two Jinchūriki. He wasn’t ignoring the six-tailed slug who was trotting around his home and burbling to the children who were giggling at him. He wasn’t ignoring the woman on his bed who was caring for her child and smirking at him. He wasn’t ignoring the man who had settled down on the floor by the bed and was fiddling with the bandages on his large blade. He was simply preparing a meal (although not a particularly glamorous one) for his guests whilst he – digested and processed the new information he had received.

“It’s not much but it’s hot and filling.” He said as he poured water onto the dried noodles and stirred them before covering each bowl with a plate. The children scampered up to count and watched the bowls eagerly.

As soon as the three minutes had been reached, he lifted the plates off the bowls and carried them over to his kotatsu. The children trotted after him like ducklings, clutching a pair of chopsticks each and thanked him politely before descending on the food as if they hadn’t eaten in weeks.

Han offered a bowl to Kisame and the sharp-toothed man accepted it with a begrudging thanks.

“Would you like a bowl Uzu-sama?” Han asked. Did island spirits (beings?) need to eat? He didn’t want to be rude.

“Not right now thank you. I’m afraid that although I know you are Kokuō’s Jinchūriki, I do not know your name. We have introduced ourselves rather shabbily I’m afraid. I would like to thank you for your hospitality and sharing your food, if you wouldn’t mind giving me your name?” Uzu said.

Han wasn’t surprised at the woman/spirit/being’s manners. It seemed almost fitting that she was so polite and well-spoken.

“I am Han.”

“Thank you, Han-kun. I am very grateful for your aid. Utakata’s sickness would have been trickier to treat in the snow.”
Han nodded. “I thought Jinchūriki didn’t really get sick.”

Uzu wrinkled her nose.

“You are human are you not? Jinchūriki can get sick it is just that their Bijuu help them burn through sickness faster and so you would not necessarily notice small ailments such as colds. It was just bad luck that Utakata managed to contract a stronger sickness. Saiken is boosting his recovery already but in flushing it out it has caused a fever and the dreams that come with being sick. That is what caused Utakata to draw on Saiken’s chakra and how you found us.” She explained.

It sort of made sense.

Han nodded and made his own bowl of instant ramen. His coffee was still on his side table, half drunk and he added some more hot water – refusing to waste it. It didn’t taste as good, but he thought it probably wouldn’t have tasted good at all if he had left a stranger to die in the snow.

Soon the only sounds in his cabin were the slurping of broth and noodles and the giggles of the children as the noodles wriggled around and hung from their mouths. It made a change from the usual silence that filled his home. Han didn’t find the change uncomfortable at all.

*  

The children, once finished with their ramen, thanked him and brought their bowls over to the sink. Han had learnt their names from eavesdropping on their conversations watched as Kimimaro rinsed them out and wiped them clean with the water in the bowl in the sink whilst Yugito and Jūgo curled up sleepily on the rug near the fire.

Kimimaro, once the washing up was complete joined them and Kisame lumbered over to wrap them all in blankets had produced from a storage scroll. The blue-skinned man returned to his position guarding the bed but had left a blanket folded up on Han’s overstuffed arm chair with a grunted sentence about being thankful and the blanket was the best he could offer at the moment.

Han waited until the young ones had fallen asleep before removing his armour. Piece by piece his body relaxed as the not unsubstantial weight was lifted from him. It was a relief to have it off once more.

He scratched at his bald scalp and yawned, tired from all the excitement that had disturbed his once peaceful evening.

Sleep beckoned to him and he gratefully sank into his overstuffed armchair, tucking the patterned blanket around his legs.

*  

His dreams were unusual and for the first time in a long time Kokuō appeared to him, pulling him from a dream that did not feel like his own. He had never seen red sand beaches and cliffs before, nor had he ever run and jumped over whirlpools.

_It has been a while, Han._ The Gobi said. She loomed over him in his mindscape. He noticed for the first time that the island on which she laid was made of red sand. Just like the sand in his unusual dreams.

_Indeed._ Han replied. _We do not often converse. Why have you pulled me here?_

Kokuō stared at him coolly.
You have met my Mother. I wished to ask what you intend to do now? Will you remain hiding up here in Yuki no Kuni?

Han suppressed his surprise. Whilst he didn’t have an antagonistic relationship with his Bijuu (unlike Rōshi whom he hadn’t seen in years since the older man’s defection) he and Kokuo had agreed not to pester each other and remained civilly distant. Kokuō didn’t interfere with him and he didn’t ask her for power.

I do not know yet. I’ve barely been acquainted with Uzu for a few hours and we haven’t exactly had the opportunity for stimulating conversation. Han said drolly.

Kokuō sniffed and turned her head away. Han could have sworn she was pouting.

I know that. But…

Han watched as the Gobi shifted on her legs and her tails tensed. The water lapping at his legs seemed agitated for a moment before calming and becoming serene once more.

I would like, to speak with my Mother.

His first instinct was to deny and refuse vehemently. He knew what a Bijuu could do if their Jinchūriki gave up control. But the way Kokuō was watching him as if she expected and anticipated his refusal, yet had began the overtures to asking anyway, it just seemed as if she was hoping against hope.

Could you not speak through me? He offered as a compromise and saw Kokuō give up instantly. She turned away from him and sank onto the sandy island, her head facing away from him and her tails wrapping around her.

It would not be the same. She whispered and her voice was so bitter. Han felt a pang of remorse spike his chest. He rubbed at it uncomfortably.

I cannot allow you to take over Kokuō-san. I – I just can’t.

I see. Thank you for speaking with me.

Han was pushed from Kokuo’s prison and back into his dreams. He spent the rest of his slumber dreaming of running over deep blue oceans, chasing sakura petals on a breeze, rolling and playing in verdant meadows and gazing up at a star-filled sky with warm companions pressing in on either side.

When he woke, a single tear escaped his eye.

They had been truly beautiful memories.

*

Chapter End Notes

Okay so, I have this headcanon that Han is bald as bald can be… The guy has no eyebrows so why not no hair?! I don’t remember seeing the guy without his kasa in canon so this is my new official headcanon. Also, Kokuō is the dolphin-horse Bijuu
(so can Kokuo swim too and is she like super clever?) and dolphins don’t have hair so… #baldJinchūrikiHan #dolphinHan

Next Chapter - Han Part Three:
Han has grown accustomed to his overcrowded cabin. Uzu and the foundlings leave, Han decides to stay. He starts hearing a voice... And has an Elsa a la Frozen 2 moment.... (I regret nothing).
Han - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Han has grown accustomed to his overcrowded cabin. Uzu and the foundlings leave, Han decides to stay. He starts hearing a voice... And has an Elsa a la Frozen 2 moment.... (I regret nothing).

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always for all the love!

Come find me on Tumblr to talk more if you want!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Han

(Part Three)

*

Han had grown used to his cabin being overcrowded. It was a vast change from his formative years – being alone and a feared Jinchūriki. Uzu’s children had absolutely no concept of boundaries or personal space.

Yugito seemed to think she could ride along on his back whenever she wanted to, jabbering on at him having conversations with him even though he hadn’t made a single response. Matatabi had materialised as well and she took over the space closest to the fire, lounging like a house cat in the warmth from the flames. One of the only times Yugito was quiet was when she was catnapping with her Bijuu.

Kimimaro had helped himself to Han’s book collection and would commandeer his overstuffed armchair with Jūgo and read to the younger boy. The pair wouldn’t leave his armchair unless it was to eat, sleep or bathe. He missed his armchair.

Kisame had taken over his kitchen and meagre supplies. The teenager (Han had been wholly surprised to discover that he was so young) grumbled and bemoaned over the cooking space and ingredients before supplementing them with his own from a sealing scroll devoted to the culinary arts. This was one invasion of his space Han could get behind however, as he wasn’t the most enthusiastic cook and Kisame’s creations were always tasty and filling.

Utakata’s fever had finally broken but the boy remained weak for several days, drained from fighting off the vicious infection. He was polite and apologetic when he spoke to Han for the first time. Thanking him for the use of his home and reassuring him that he would get his bed back soon.
Han found Uzu the most invasive however and it was due to her sheer presence. Knowing what he did now, having gently and not subtly interrogated the children about their mother/sister figure, he could sense the sheer amount of nature energy she held. She was beyond Bijuu levels, beyond Kokuō, Saiken and Matatabi put together. Yet she was sitting in his house, sewing up torn clothing (some of which was his as she had offered to repair it as a way of thanking him), giving the children lessons in reading, writing, mathematics and geography and filling his house with her presence.

But she didn’t ask about Kokuō. Not once mentioning his Bijuu since that first night.

It was – disconcerting.

* 

“Thank you for your hospitality, Han-kun.” Uzu bowed and her children, all stood out in the snow behind her, bowed too.

“You’re welcome.” He said calmly and gave his own smaller bow.

For just under a week his home had been invaded and filled with life and noise and people. Now, with Utakata well enough to move again they were setting off towards Yukigakure, resuming their travels once more.

He watched them trudge towards the village and the road that would lead them to Yukigakure. He watched until they were little black dots on the horizon that eventually vanished.

A sigh seeped from him and he turned back to his now empty cabin. His bed was his once more, the sheets freshly replaced and the ones Utakata had used were hanging up to dry from the hobby horse near the fire.

It was quiet too. Han had never thought that quiet could be overwhelming. He had always longed for it before.

He shrugged and made himself some coffee and settled down with his reclaimed book. He’d get used to the quiet again. Probably. Maybe. Hopefully.

* 

Han really hadn’t gotten used to the quiet again. It had been weeks since Uzu and her ragtag bunch of children had left. Weeks! And he found the silence irritating. It was strange how the variety of snores had helped lull him to sleep. How he had grown fond of Yugito’s almost non-stop chatter. How he had enjoyed Kimimaro’s dramatic story-telling and Jūgo’s gasps and squeals at the appropriate moments.

Kokuō was still sulking in his head, he could feel it oozing from the Gobi. She was even affecting his dreams now. Or something was. Filling his nights with whirlpools and waves, hot red sands and coral reefs, meadows of wildflowers and a sea of poppies, red-roofed houses and the sound of laughter and happiness and contentment.

And constantly beneath all that a whispering voice *Come home. Come home. Come home. Come home Kokuō. Come home.*

Han was even hearing it in his waking moments. Tugging and pleading with him. Over and over and over. And he could feel the urge to go, to follow the feathery voice and the sense of home and fulfilment that would keep him awake when it wasn’t seducing him through his dreams.
Stop it! Han finally pleaded to Kokuō. The Gobi lifted her head off her forelegs and peered down at him. Her long snout seemed disdainful.

Stop what?

The whispers. The feeling of wanting to go home. This is our home now.

Kokuō scoffed and laid her head back down. Closing her eyes and ignoring him.

This may be your home Jinchūriki, She didn’t even bother naming him. But my home is Uzushio and Uzu-sama. My home is my Mother who you wouldn’t let me speak to.

Han snarled. Well you can just put up with Yuki. We’re here now. We’re staying. So, stop the whispering!

He stomped up to Kokuō, but she didn’t flinch. The whispers echoed around her prison and sent ripples through the water surrounding her island of red sand (sand that he now suspected was a mirror of Uzushio’s sand).

I’m not causing the whispers. That is Mother. She knows where I am. She is calling to me. She has been calling to me for centuries, speaking to me, comforting me. You can only hear her now because you have met Mother. Because you know, in that part of you that you are trying to block out, that Mother could be your home too.

Han left Kokuō’s prison and heard her snickering in an almost cruel manner.

He wasn’t going to leave. He wasn’t. Yuki no Kuni was home now. And he liked it.

*

Han visited Kokuō many, many times. Every time her answer was the same. And every time the whispers continued. They were beginning to drive Han mad.

He had been trying to read his book and the same paragraph, the same words kept standing out to him. He had read them beyond recall now.

His lips formed them once again and his breath hummed them aloud.

“I am looking for friends. What does that mean – tame?”

‘It is an act too often neglected,’ said the fox. ‘It means to establish ties.’”

Kokuō perked up in his mind. He could sense her listening. He wondered. He wondered if, maybe, Kokuō could be tamed, could be a friend.

“But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world…” He murmured.

Having second thoughts – Han? Kokuō asked. She had finally used his name once more. He had forgotten how it sounded.

I suppose you could say that. He replied.

Can we leave the Land of Snow now? It’s too cold here. She suggested with a prim sniff.

He knew what she really wanted. He could tell and he knew. Han wanted it too.
The whispering voice changed.

_Come home. Come home. Come home, Kokuō and Han. Come home._

*

Han carefully packed the last of his books, the one about the prince, into his bag and carefully closed it up. Most of his belongings he was leaving behind. They were just things he had bought to make his life in the wasteland of Snow easier but his books he could not bear to part with. They were like friends and adventures that he had longed to have.

He might be setting out on his own adventure and would hopefully make new friends (Family Kokuō said) but he wouldn’t leave his old friends behind even if they were just paper and ink.

He had swept his cabin, stored all non-perishable foods in a storage scroll, covered the furniture with dust cloths and made sure the shutters were tightly closed. All that was left was to lock up and head towards the port town and back to the mainland.

Han shouldered his book heavy bag and bolstered his resolve. He was going. He would find Uzu and ask if he could go with them. And maybe she could do something for Kokuō, like she had done for Matatabi and Saiken. No one deserved to be trapped in a prison like the Bijuu were. It wasn’t even a nice prison.

Closing and locking the door to his cabin felt like finishing a chapter in a book but not like the ending chapter. Rather like one of the beginning chapters, before the quest truly began. Han was full of anticipation and worry and nerves and excitement.

_Stop thinking and move already. For a shinobi who uses steam to move fast, you can be awfully slow._ Kokuō sniped.

Han shrugged his shoulders. Some things you just had to take your time over.

*

Finding Uzu was a lot easier than he had thought it would be. Apart from the fact that the whispering voice that Kokuō said was Uzushio the island’s (and that was a whole kettle of fish in itself that Han wasn’t going to touch) was guiding their way, he simply had to follow rumoured sighting of Kishi Bojin and all the children she had stolen.

Updating his Bingo Book with the most recent information gathered during the war had led him to discover Kishi Bojin’s entry. The apt description of a red-haired woman wearing elegant clothing would have been enough of a clue, but the accompanying photo (taken by a desperate shinobi) showing a flash of crimson hair pinned with black bells, paper cranes and sea shells and a sliver of the woman’s face, only confirmed that the dreaded Kishi Bojin he had heard whispers of, was indeed Uzu.

Her trail of appearances led him to Ame, at the heart of the conflict. Han would have turned away or squirted around such a war zone but Kokuō, the whispering voice and the rumours of Kishi Bojin led him straight into the nation.

It was when he was deciding whether to enter Amegakure and continue his search or to wait and see if more rumours sprang up that Han came across Uzu once more. Well, the group he would later learn were Uzu’s Ame trio found him.

The ginger boy had assumed Han had attacked the village he was passing through. Having
discarded his hitai-ate, Han could understand why the leader would assume him was a rogue nin but it was rather frustrating that the boy wouldn’t listen properly. He kept going on about peace. Every time Han attempted speaking, he was interrupted.

“I didn’t attack the village!” He finally lost his patience and bellowed, steam hissing out from his armour with his frustration. The ginger teen ceased his yammering abruptly.

“Oh. Well, why didn’t you say so?” He asked.

Han regretted leaving Yuki no Kuni. In fact, he was going to turn around and walk back. His cabin would still be there. It was better than being here at any rate.

“I did say so. Several times. You weren’t listening.” Han growled. “I’m looking for someone. The woman they call Kishi Bojin.”

The girl who had been snickering stopped and frowned piercing Han with a scowl that made his skin crawl.

“Why?”

“Because I’ve met her, and I wanted to ask her if I could join her.” Han replied.

“If you’ve met her,” The girl said. “Then you know her real name. What is it?”

“Uzushio.”

“Hmm, seems he does know Uzu-kaa-chan.” The ginger commented. “Come on, we’ll take you to her.”

Han resisted the urge to cry. How many children did Uzu have?

*

Chapter End Notes

The book Han is reading is Le Petit Prince (The Little Prince) by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. I know it doesn’t fit in with Naruto verse but I’m re-reading it at the moment and that bit stuck in my head whilst I was writing Han’s chapters so it’s in Uzu-verse now.

Fun Fact: I watched Frozen 2 hours before writing this chapter... I saw Han as Elsa so many times and had to actively refrain from putting ‘Into the Unknown’ lyrics into this chapter. The image of Han as Elsa however is pure crack and I love it.

Kishi Bojin – the goddess/demon who ate children but then turned good (see Itachi Part Three for the original explanation)

Next Chapter - Han Part Four: Han is part of the family now. Uzu gets propositioned. Her kids don't take it well and beat up the pervert who makes the proposition.
Chapter Summary

Han is part of the family now. Uzu gets propositioned. Her kids don't take it well and beat up the pervert who makes the proposition.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments!

Content Warning:
References to prostitution and brothels. Implied payment for sex.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

---

Han

-and a little bit of Rōshi-

(Part Four)

*

When Rōshi met Uzu he ended up with a shopping list of injuries. A black eye, broken nose, shattered arm, bruised ribs, twisted ankle and hurt pride. The last one was the most grievous of all. After all it wasn’t a seasoned warrior or shinobi who had caused his wounds. It wasn’t wounds gained from a daring mission or rescue.

Instead he received all his wounds from a bunch of feral children who took great offense when he called their mother a prostitute.

Inside his head, as he lay flat on his back staring up at the bright lights of the street and faintly hearing the laughter and shouts of the people who had watched his utter humiliation, Yonbi was howling with laughter.

Rōshi hated his Bijuu.

*

Han had been travelling with Uzu and her menagerie of children for weeks. He frequently questioned whether returning to Yuki was a viable option. After meeting the Ame trio (who were hell spawn) and seeing how all of Uzu’s gathered children orbited the woman as if she were the sun, he understood some of Kokuō’s desire to be with her mother again.

But after leaving Rain with four less children (Utakata had remained behind with the Ame trio) yet still feeling as if there were more of them, Han longed for the silence of his cabin and the wind whistling over the snowy plains.
Kisame seemed to revel in Han’s discomfort. The oldest of Uzu’s children was a complete bastard. He would rile Yugito up and then send her to expend her energy with Han.

“You’re a Jinchūriki. You’ve got Kokuō. The fastest of the Bijuu. You can keep up with an eleven-year-old superpowered girl and her Bijuu. I mean, if you can’t well, you’re kind of a pathetic Jinchūriki.”

Kisame had cackled when Han had agreed to play/train with Yugito. Han didn’t regret it. Not until Yugito had managed to shatter his kasa and torn the cloth he used to cover his head. Now he was forced to walk along with his bald scalp exposed and Kisame making sniggering comments about looking like an egg.

Han was almost constantly considering returning to Yuki. At least there the only thing around to laugh at him was Kokuō and the odd penguin or seal.

*

The Land of Medicines was a fertile and seemingly peaceful place. Untouched by the war and the few shinobi within its borders were its own. It made a welcome change from Ame and the surrounding nations embroiled in combat.

Uzu hadn’t explained why she had led them to the Land of Medicines. Han had asked but she just shrugged and carried on walking.

“Is this really how you’ve spent your lives?” Han asked the children one night when Uzu was off bathing.

“Not our whole lives.” Yugito snarked. “Uzu-nee helped me leave Kumo when I was five but ever since then I’ve been travelling with her. When we’re not travelling, we live on Uzushio. She’s looking for survivors from Uzushio, ones who were transported out during the siege, shinobi who were completing missions and tradesmen and civilians who were off the island for various reasons.”


“I always thought the Bijuu were just wild chakra constructs.” Han said.

Jūgo giggled and shook his head, dislodging the weasel that had slunk into their camp and draped itself around his neck. The animal chittered at the boy and he apologised.

“Okaa-san says that humans live too short lives and so they forget too easily and too readily.” The youngest boy said. “They don’t remember the old stories properly and change them when they don’t like what they hear.”

Han agreed. He knew that himself. Iwa’s history was full of contradictions even in the written word. Books written by different factions with different philosophies had opposing details of events and outcomes. It was the way humans were.

“We can’t all live to be eons old though.” Kimimaro teased and Jūgo blushed.

“The animals don’t live to be super old, but they pass down the stories to each other and they know a lot more than you think.” Jūgo mumbled and stroked the weasel in his lap.

“Enough philosophy. You’re giving me a headache.” Kisame protested. He rolled onto his back and stared up at the night sky.
“Aww, poor Kisame.” Yugito mocked. “It’s not our fault you have a tiny brain.”

Kimimaro and Jūgo snickered but quickly fell silent when Kisame fixed them with a cold stare.

“I’d watch it brats. Or else I might get peckish in the middle of the night and decided to nibble on your plump arms.” The sharp-toothed boy warned.

Jūgo looked at his arm with trepidation. Kimimaro looked at his with disbelief.

“I’m too skinny to be eaten.” The pale-haired boy announced. “You should eat Han instead. He’s much meatier than we are combined.”

Jūgo nodded frantically and blushed when Kimimaro winked at him. The youngest boy squeaked and buried himself under his blanket, covering his red face and nestling amongst the animals that had already settled themselves around him.

If Uzu was a magnet for children (and broken people according to Kisame) then Jūgo was one for animals. Han had woken up a few days ago when his kasa had still been intact, to find a family of chipmunks using his headgear for a nest and Jūgo carrying it with a happy grin on his face.

*  

Howling Wolf Village was – unique. There were multiple thriving businesses and most of the citizens were happy and cheery. But Han had also noticed the seedier trades. The ones being conducted on street corners and in dark nooks.

There were several doorways in streets occupied by thin, pale and dark-eyed people. They appeared to be dreaming and had euphoric smiles on their faces. Jūgo didn’t like them and Han had resorted to carrying the boy in his arms.

“They don’t feel right.” Jūgo whispered in Han’s ear. It was true. “The animals say they’re sick. That they ate bad things and now they smell sick.”

Even Uzu, whom Han had seen comforting a dying shinobi on the battlefield, caking her robes in blood and guts as she stroked a sweaty terrified cheek, had curled her lip at the men and women that clawed at her robes as she passed – begging for money.

“Kisame, don’t let Yugito or Kimimaro out of your sight.” She ordered. The teen was already holding Yugito’s hand as she too was uncomfortable and Kimimaro trotted next to him.

As they made their way out of the pleasant streets filled with presentable shops and people, more and more of the thin people appeared as did more men coming and going from a certain district.

“Uzu-sama,” Han spoke up hesitantly. “You do know what area we’re approaching?”

Uzu nodded.

“Is it wise to take the young ones to such a place?” He asked desperately. If he was being honest, he didn’t want to go into the district. “Could we not go to an inn first?”

Uzu shook her head. “This shouldn’t take long. I can sense Son nearby.”

“What is this place?” Kimimaro asked as they entered the district proper. Lanterns and lush gardens illuminated the area as night fell. There were women displayed in the buildings they walked past. Clad in beautiful silks and lavish robes, laughing and smiling and talking to the men
who peered in at them from the wooden bars that separated them.

Some women were out walking with men, graceful and seductive kōshi-jōro and tayū with painted faces and coiffed hair.

Han felt heat rising on his cheeks and he stammered futilely. Kisame rolled his eyes but let the man continue his flustering.

“This is a yūkaku.” Uzu said. “It is where men come to buy women’s, and sometimes men’s, time and company and seek pleasure from them. It is not somewhere I would bring you willingly, however this village makes me uneasy and I want to find Son and whole up in an inn until morning. The sooner I find Son, the sooner we leave.”

“Well why don’t we just camp outside the village?” Kisame asked.

“No!” The woman’s reply was sharp. “There is something, something outside the village. I can’t tell what it is, but it doesn’t feel right. It is safer in here than out there.”

“Are you frightened Uzu-nee?” Yugito asked. Han found himself wondering that too. What could be so bad that it made a woman who’s entire being was nature energy want to remain in a seemingly sordid village.

“Not for myself.” She responded.

The children frowned and queried her answer but Han and Kisame shared an understanding look. She wasn’t worried about defending herself but them and her younger children.

A raucous laugh broke out in front of them and they watched as a group of women giggled and squealed, trotting and dancing around a man who was bellowing with laughter as he chased after them.

Uzu had stopped and her head was tilted on one side, her brow furrowed slightly and her lips in a moue of disappointment.

The man came to a halt in front of her and looked her over lavishly. His eyes poured up her from her feet to her robes, spending a little time on her waist and chest before taking in her haughty features and red hair.

“Ahhh! Fin-ly! A red-head! You’re jus’ wha’ I’ve been lookin fur.” The man slurred. They could all smell the alcohol that he seemed to have bathed in. His cheeks (what they could see of them beneath his own red-hair) were ruddy and his eyes were watery with drink.

“I doubt you have been looking for me. Finding you here of all places is most disappointing Son.” Uzu said.

“Son? Son? Ma name’s not Son. Issa stupid name.” The man brushed at the air as if he could fend off the name. He belched and a wave of rancid alcohol wafted over Uzu and Kisame who had handed Yugito over to Kimimaro.

Kisame gagged and turned his head to the side, searching for fresh air. Han thought the man in front of them looked familiar. But he couldn’t remember where he had seen him before. Maybe he’d heard of him?

“Ma name, bootiful, is Rōshi! So wha’ do ya say we go back to your house and I’ll pay to spend the night with ya? Ya look like ya know how to have a good time.”
Realisation struck Han. This was Rōshi, the Jinchūriki of Yonbi. Before he could intervene however Rōshi sealed his fate.

The short man lunged up towards Uzu and wrapped his thick arms around her waist, dragging her forwards and down before nuzzling his face against her neck and mouthing at it wetly. Caught in his grasp, Uzu yelped and struggled to extricate herself. Her arms were trapped by her sides and she hissed like an angry cat.

Her hiss was echoed by Yugito, Kimimaro and Jūgo who all launched themselves at Rōshi and tugged at his arms.

“Let go of Nee-san!” Yugito howled and her claws left marks on Rōshi’s cheek.

Kimimaro was similarly incensed and he tugged fiercely on the man’s ponytail, using it like a leash to rip him away. Jūgo was bristling with anger and his body transformed slightly before he began wailing on Rōshi.

Their attack sent the yūjo that had been giggling and fluttering around Rōshi scattering.

“Shouldn’t we stop them?” Han leaned down to murmur in Kisame’s ear.

The shark-toothed teen was helping readjust Uzu’s robes, straightening out her hair, mopping at her neck with a handkerchief and removing Rōshi’s slobber.

“No. Think of this as training,” Kisame said sweetly. Han shivered. Kisame was almost as scary as a Bijuu.

*

Rōshi lay defeated on the ground and groaned. Yonbi was screeching and leaping around with euphoria in his head.

He really didn’t like his Bijuu.

*

Chapter End Notes

My internet search history for this chapter is super weird. Also, Rōshi kept going Scottish, so apologies if his intoxicated voice sounds a bit weird… Apparently, he turns into a Glaswegian when drunk…

Translations:
kōshi-jōro – high ranking courtesans just below tayū
tayū – high ranking courtesans
yükaku – red-light district
yūjo – women of pleasure/prostitutes
Next Chapter - Roshi Part One:
Roshi is kidnapped (or Jinchuriki-napped?). Uzu throws some truths around. Son Goku takes over for a bit. Son Goku doesn't agree with his Mother on some issues.
Chapter Summary

Roshi Part One:
Roshi is kidnapped (or Jinchuriki-napped?). Uzu throws some truths around. Son Goku takes over for a bit. Son Goku doesn't agree with his Mother on some issues.

Chapter Notes

350+ kudos reached which means, double update! :D
You get Roshi Part One and Two tonight!
Thanks for all the bookmarks, subscriptions, kudos and comments.

FYI there will be no update of ITAV tomorrow (23/07/2020) because I will be posting the side chapter (called Walk Beside of Me) the Ame Trio's time during the 3rd Shinobi War. 'Walk Beside of Me' is longer than usual chapters (14000+words), contains two explicit scenes and doesn't feature Uzu and the family much, which is why I haven't posted it within ITAV.
The events that happen within the side story I will cover in a note before Roshi Part Three if you do not want to/are not of an age where you should be reading explicit scenes so that those who do not read that chapter will not miss out on the events/plot before it weaves back into ITAV.

But please do go and read 'Walk Beside of Me' when it is posted if you feel comfortable. I know a fair few of you haven't bothered with the other side stories/chapters but WBoM is more relevant than Glory and Age with Grace. It also contains smut if that floats your boat.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rōshi

(Part One)

* *

Getting his arse kicked by a bunch of pre-teens was not one of Rōshi’s finest moments. Getting laughed at by what seemed like the entire population of a village was also not a great highlight. Discovering that he had been humiliated in front of a fellow Jinchūriki from his own homeland was the icing on the cake of embarrassment.

“Can’t we leave this one behind Okaa-san?” A disdainful voice said. Rōshi looked up at the startlingly beautiful white-haired child whose face was twisted with disgust. “We don’t want some disgusting pervert travelling with us.”

The other hell spawn who had pummelled him all voiced their own protests and disgust. Rōshi
missed the buzz from the alcohol. Yonbi had flushed it out of him during his humiliation and now he wanted that haze back. It would probably also make his aching ribs and throbbing eye feel less painful.

“Unfortunately not.” The woman said. “I feel sorry for Son.”

“Keh, do you think Son would heal him if I pummelled him too?”

“No, Kisame. The others have handled it quite well.” The woman scolded. There was a long drawn out, put upon sigh and then Rōshi saw a meaty hand grabbing the collar of his shirt and hefting him into the air. He was tossed over a shoulder with absolutely no consideration for his potentially broken ribs and he wheezed as the aforementioned shoulder slammed into his stomach.

“Keh, you’re just no fun Uzu.” Kisame rumbled beneath Rōshi.

He tried to lift his head but was still sucking in gasps of air after having most of it forced out of him.

“Uzu-sama, we should leave this place. Maybe find an inn?”

Rōshi’s brow furrowed. He knew that voice. Granted it was deeper than last he heard it, but the inflections and accent and manner of speech were known to him. Craning his head he looked around and felt a grin on his face.

“Han! Help a buddy out would you?”

Han winced and shook his head. Rōshi noticed how the light from the lanterns gleamed off his bald scalp (so that’s why he always wore a kasa. Going bald at such a young age must’ve been tough).

“Shut up, pervert.” The young girl scolded him. “Han-nii-san isn’t going to listen to you. None of us are.”

Rōshi spluttered. “You’re the ones who attacked me! And I’m not a pervert! And this could be considered kidnapping!”

“You slobbered all over Uzu-kaa-chan. Like a dog.” The youngest boy said with far too much dry sarcasm. Inside his head Yonbi howled in indignation at being associated with dogs. Monkeys really don’t like dogs, so it was the highest of possible insults. Rōshi felt his sore head ache with the Yonbi’s displeasure.

“Come along Yugito, Kimimaro, Jugo.” Uzu called. “We’re going to find an inn and then we’ll sort out this mess in the morning. Kisame are you alright to carry him?”

The shoulder beneath Rōshi shrugged, jabbing him in the stomach once again.

“He isn’t heavy Uzu. Besides if I get tired I can always drag him along behind me.”

There was a chorus of snickers and agreement from the peanut gallery of children. Han snickered too. Rōshi heard it all. He contemplated freeing himself from Kisame’s shoulder but the blade handle that suddenly moved and wrapped itself around his neck gave him pause.

“Umm, Kisame?” Han questioned tentatively as the giant of a Jinchūriki lumbered along behind them.
“Yeah?”

“Your sword is, well it’s, strangling Rōshi. And he’s turning purple.”

Another long sigh. Rōshi felt his face heating up. His eyes were wide and he clawed at the scale-like texture wrapped sinuously around the column of his neck.

“Samehada, leave the pervert alone. You can drain his chakra, but we need him breathing.”

The sword handle unwound from around his neck and Rōshi sucked in air once again. The drain on his chakra caused him worry but it was too late for him to do anything in defence. He resigned himself to being kidnapped and carried around like a sack of potatoes.

But he would listen and watch and use the next available opportunity to escape. If he was feeling generous, he might even take Han with him. The younger Jinchūriki had obviously been coerced or manipulated or brainwashed into accompanying this crazy woman and her hell spawn.

It all depended on how magnanimous Rōshi felt. And whether or not Yonbi’s chakra healed him quickly.

*

Unfortunately for Rōshi, no such opportunity for escape had presented itself. Their arrival at an inn had caused some upset. The inn keeper didn’t really want to admit such a large and odd-looking party, especially when one of their company was draped over another’s like a kill from a hunt.

The inn keeper did, however, accept additional coin as recompense for hosting such barbaric and odd travellers. And a few sweet words from the Uzu woman had helped too.

Once in their room, Kisame had deposited Rōshi unceremoniously in the corner and the Yonbi Jinchūriki found he lacked energy to do anything apart from sit and watch. The group moved around each other, settling in for the night with ease. Han took up a position nearest the door, his large bulk blocking the entranceway, Kisame going to the window and sitting with his chakra-stealing blade and starring out at the rooftops of the village.

Rōshi watched intrigued as Uzu readied the younger ones for bed. Her fingers deftly plucked hairpins from Yugito and then gently combed through the thick mane of blonde hair. Kimimaro was next, his hair slightly shorter than the girl’s and not as thick but he smiled happily as Uzu undid the braids on the crown of his head and smoothed out the kinks that had formed during the day. Jugo lay curled up on a futon and only settled into slumber when Uzu curled her body around his and stroked and teased at his hair, whispering a story to him that the older children listened to keenly as well.

Once all the younglings were asleep, Uzu left the futon they had puppy piled onto, covering them with a blanket and smoothing hair from faces before she departed, and turned her attention to Rōshi. She knelt gracefully in front of him and took in his plethora of wounds.

“It seems you do not have a respectful relationship with Son Gokū. Otherwise these minor injuries would have healed already.”

Rōshi frowned. “What the hell are you talking about? These aren’t minor injuries.”

She raised a brow. “On a Jinchūriki they are.”

Rōshi’s back straightened and he felt his lips curling back from his teeth in a snarl.
“And what the hell do you know about Jinchūriki?”

“More than you do.” She retorted sharply. “And I know that Son Gokū, for all his temper and hot headedness doesn’t enjoy watching others suffer.”

“Who’s Son Gokū?”

Uzu’s nose crinkled and her upper lip rose in disdain. She sneered at him.

“You don’t even know. Or maybe, haven’t bothered to remember. Son Gokū is the Yonbi, the Bijuu trapped inside you. I pity him.”

“Pity him?! You should pity us! We didn’t ask to be turned into vessels for chakra monsters!”

“And they didn’t ask to be put inside you! Humans did that all on their own. Trapping that which they could not or would not understand and then trying to bend them to their will. Subjugating the Bijuu when they were not born to be weapons of war and destruction.” Uzu snarled back. Her voice was hushed despite her ire. It was more intimidating than if she had been screeching like a fisherman’s wife.

Rōshi’s mouth snapped shut and he pouted mulishly.

“I pity Son Gokū. Trapped in such an ungrateful Jinchūriki.”

Within him the Yonbi startled into movement. Although still confined by the seal, he used Rōshi’s lack of chakra to take control of the man’s voice and throat. In a startling change, Rōshi was suddenly the passenger in his own body and he could only listen as Yonbi wept.

“Mother! Is it really you?”

Uzu’s face brightened drastically and she smiled. Han on the other hand stiffened and turned his attention from the door to glance worriedly at Rōshi’s changed voice and body.

“It is so good to hear your voice once more Son Gokū.”

“I have missed you Mother. You and my home. And even my siblings.”

A blue and black cat made of fire materialised next to Uzu.

“Matatabi! I thought I sensed your cool flames.” Son Gokū cheered.

“Indeed, older brother. It has been a long time. You do not seem to have been as lucky as I in our Jinchūriki.”

“No. Unfortunately not. This one is just several in a long line of disappointments. But your little one seems to be a handful of claws and fire, just like you!” The monkey Bijuu laughed.

Matatabi sat up taller and preened, her nose lifting into the air in the way only felines did.

“My kitten is indeed good, mrrow.” She purred.

“But… How are you outside the child’s body without them being dead? I thought it was impossible for us to leave our Jinchūriki without them dying? Not that I’ve tried or anything.” Son Gokū hastily held up Rōshi’s hands in defence when both Uzu and Matatabi fixed him with stares.

Of course, it was a lie. The Yonbi had tried many times to take over Rōshi’s body and the few
scarce times the shinobi had been severely injured, close to death, the Four Tails had attempted to break the seal. It never worked of course. Rōshi would almost admire Yonbi’s persistence if it didn’t hurt so much every time.

“I altered their seals.” Uzu explained. “I changed them so that Matatabi and Saiken can materialise externally without having to overwhelm Yugito and Utakata. It is a much more beneficial relationship. Unfortunately, I cannot extract Bijuu without killing their hosts and that, Son Gokū, is a line I am not going to cross.”

Rōshi felt Yonbi wince. Uzu sounded just like the Mother she was, warning her child of the consequences of bad behaviour.

“I understand Mother. Could you alter my seal? Would I be able to leave this man’s body like Matatabi?”

“I can. But only if Rōshi agrees. But you would not be able to travel freely. You would still be tethered to your Jinchūriki and your body would not be able to go too far from his before being sucked back into the seal. There are limitations on the distance a Bijuu can be separate from their Jinchūriki.”

Rōshi felt his face drop. It was disconcerting to be sensing and feeling things that he wasn’t doing in his own body.

“What about Kokuō? Have you not altered the seal on Han?” Son Gokū asked and looked in Han’s direction. The armoured man shifted uneasily.

“Han does not trust Kokuō.” Uzu said calmly. “Matatabi and Saiken were kind to their Jinchūriki and their Jinchūriki are young enough that they do not fear the Bijuu in the same way that adults do. If Han and Kokuō can build a positive relationship, then hopefully I will be able to alter the seal. Until that point it remains Han’s decision.”

“You’re too kind Mother.” Son snarled. “Why are you respecting the human’s decision and not freeing Kokuō?”

“Because, my hot-headed child, in the grand scheme humans have short lives. When Han dies, if he remains free from the great nations, Kokuō will be free. If she must live in slight discomfort until Han passes, well, his life is a drop in the ocean compared to hers. He has a right to make decisions about his life and body that I will not take away from him. The same goes for Rōshi. Even if you plead, I won’t alter his life and existence without permission.”

Rōshi felt a wave of relief. Followed closely by a cloying guilt. Was he feeling sympathy for his Bijuu?

*}

Chapter End Notes

Double Update - Roshi Part Two will be posted momentarily!
Roshi - Part Two

Chapter Notes

Double Update! Make sure you've read Roshi Part One first!

FYI there will be no update of ITAV tomorrow (23/07/2020) because I will be posting the side chapter (called Walk Beside of Me) the Ame Trio's time during the 3rd Shinobi War. 'Walk Beside of Me' is longer than usual chapters (14000+words), contains two explicit scenes and doesn't feature Uzu and the family much, which is why I haven't posted it within ITAV. The events that happen within the side story I will cover in a note before Roshi Part Three if you do not want to/are not of an age where you should be reading explicit scenes so that those who do not read that chapter will not miss out on the events/plot before it weaves back into ITAV.

But please do go and read 'Walk Beside of Me' when it is posted if you feel comfortable. I know a fair few of you haven't bothered with the other side stories/chapters but WBoM is more relevant than Glory and Age with Grace. It also contains smut if that floats your boat.

Content Warning:
Prostitution, non-explicit references to sex.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rōshi

(Part Two)

* 

Guilt was not a sensation Rōshi was overly familiar with. Sure, there were kills or missions he had felt uncomfortable about, but he had learnt quickly to push his personal feelings aside and focus on the mission. It was all for the good of Iwagakure. All for the good of his village.

Then he'd grown up a bit and seen the nations and towns beyond Iwa. Where the people didn’t spit at him, didn’t scowl at him, didn’t snarl insults or hurl stones at him. Where he could walk amongst normal people going about their normal everyday lives and be part of the crowd, alone and un-feared amongst many. Where he could sneak off and bribe kisses from beautiful women and they kissed him eagerly instead of flinching and calling him a beast or a monster.

A woman’s lips (and a woman’s body if he was being honest) was one of the greatest pleasures in this world. They were always so different and so unique. Sometimes he kissed women with painted lips who smeared colour over his own or across his skin. Sometimes he kissed girls who had curves beneath rough worn cloth and calloused hands from days spent working in fields.

If there was truly one thing Rōshi loved in this cold, hard, world it was women. He lost his virginity when he was a teen. After a simple mission, removing bandits who kept stealing from the merchants and tradesmen travelling with their wares to Iwa.
Rōshi, younger and beardless, had seen the buxom farm girl smiling and his heart skipped a beat. She was not slim, not conventionally beautiful but she had a broad smile, ruddy cheeks and a kind disposition. Their tumble in the barn, nestled in the straw and exploring each other’s bodies with hesitant virginal fingers had been unforgettable. He still remembered it with fondness years later. The scent of her sweat, the sweet smell of the dried grasses they had chosen for their escape, the sunlight dappling her skin through the barn door and the breathy moans she made as he learned her body and how to bring her to a release.

She had scratched her fingers through his hair afterwards as he lay with his head pillowed on her breasts. It had been simple, uncomplicated and untethered passion. They had made no empty promises to each other, they knew it wasn’t love but attraction, and so parted ways amicably. A year later when he passed through Rōshi had seen her married with a child and she had grinned at him, that same teasing grin. There had been no tumble in the hay that time however, as he had no desire to come between her and her husband who clearly adored her.

Leaving Iwa had been an easy decision. He had grown tired and hard to the villagers he was supposed to be protecting. He longed for the open road and people who thanked him for things he did, even if it was just helping an old man fix his roof or mending the spoke on a wheel. So, he left.

Of course, Iwa shinobi had pursued him but there was little they could do to stop him. They had trained him too well and combined with his lava style the only one who could have been a match for him was the Tsuchikage. But Rōshi planned his escape well and chose the one time the Tsuchikage was away on negotiations with Flower Nation to leave. By the time the Tsuchikage learnt of his desertion, Rōshi was already nations away with his hitai-ate abandoned on the road from Iwa and his clothing changed so he looked nothing like the shinobi (weapon) they had made.

He had avoided the conflict that broke out. The Second Shinobi War was a farce. As if shinobi would ever stop warring with each other. He had stayed well and far away, earning money in whatever profession he fancied.

He had been a circus performer, a farm labourer, a blacksmith’s assistant, a mercenary, a bodyguard and a ropemaker in his travels. He enjoyed his time as a ‘normal’ person. He spent his money on things he wanted, he bought food and drink and women (when he couldn’t tempt the latter into his bed for free) and he helped those he wanted.

The Third Shinobi War was even more amusing to him. Only a few years since the previous one and then they were at each other’s throats again, barking and baying and biting like dogs (he really hated dogs). Again Rōshi avoided the fighting and war zones. Rumours flooded across the nations however. Tales of massacres and slaughters on all sides. Shinobi becoming legends, Konoha’s Yellow Flash, Copy Ninja Kakashi Hatake, The Ame Trio, Sasori of the Red Sand and Yagura the newest Mizukage to name a few.

Rōshi heard about another, like the Ame Trio who were rumoured to be non-lethal. Kishi Bojin, a demoness who stole children but killed no one.

His Bingo Book had been updated and he recognised Uzu. She was distinctive despite the scant information her page contained. Kisame had an entry too, wanted by Kiri. Uzu wasn’t wanted by any single nation but she had a warning out against harming children in her vicinity. The photo hadn’t done her justice. He would never have thought he would meet her however, let alone in the yūkaku in Howling Wolf Village. They were almost as far from the war as you could get.

*  

If Rōshi hadn’t been intoxicated he would have done a better job at their first meeting. As it was
calling the woman his Bijuu referred to as Mother a prostitute was not his best moment. And Son Goku wasn’t going to let him forget it.

His Bijuu had reluctantly healed him during the night. Sharing his chakra grudgingly to mend Rōshi’s ribs, eye and other scrapes and breaks. Rōshi didn’t thank him. But he did watch carefully as Uzu interacted with Han and Yugito and Matatabi and the rest of her children.

“What’re you going to do with me now?” Rōshi grumbled as Uzu braided Kimimaro’s hair. The boy was clothed in a luxurious kimono and was kneeling in front of the woman as she entwined and pinned his hair.

Yugito and Jugo were finishing off their breakfast having already dressed and had their own hair done. Kisame and Han keeping an eye on the younger two and the entrances.

“I’m going to do nothing with you.” Uzu said. “If you would like to accompany us then you may. If you do not want to, I will not stop you. I would ask however that if you ever change your mind about Son Goku you would seek me out.”

“You’re not holding me captive?” Rōshi asked. He was confused.

“No.”

“But you drained my chakra?”

“That’s because you’re a drunken pervert.” Kisame growled. He seemed even more sullen in the morning. “And at least this way Uzu could speak to you without you flying off into a rage. I know about your reputation. Not known for keeping your temper are you?”

Rōshi bared his teeth at the teenager. Kisame snarled back, his pointed teeth looking far more fearsome than Rōshi’s flat human teeth.

“Enough.” Uzu stilled them. Kisame turned back to his food and Yugito who had nestled up against his side. Jugo had crawled into Han’s lap during their posturing and was looking rather sleepy and bored.

“I’m going then.” Rōshi announced and stood, half expecting to see them move to stop him.

“Stay well and strong Rōshi-san.” Han replied but the rest of them continued to ignore him.

He snorted and slid the door open, leaving it ajar as he stomped down the corridor towards the stairs.

“Are we really going to let him just leave like that Uzu-nee?” Yugito’s voice reached Rōshi’s ears.

“I won’t force anyone to come with us. You know that kitten.” Uzu replied softly.

“But,” Jugo’s voice was harder to hear. Rōshi paused at the top of the stairs and stilled to listen. “Isn’t Rōshi-san lonely?”

Unbidden his fist clenched at his side. Rōshi took the stairs two at a time and left the inn swiftly. He wasn’t lonely. He wasn’t.

* 

The yūkaku was quieter during the day. Peaceful almost. Rōshi had returned to the house where he had left his belongings and been relieved to find they had not been stolen or sold. The house mother
was not best pleased at being disturbed but offered to allow him to stay, to maybe purchase some
time with one or more of the girls.

Rōshi took her up on the offer. The giggling and sweetly talking pair of girls were draped over him
as he sat and sipped tea, holding up food to his mouth and feeding him. They were doing all the
usual things that he liked, fawning over him, paying attention to him, brushing his rough skin with
their fingers, kissing his cheeks and nibbling his ears. But it wasn’t as satisfying as usual.

This wasn’t freely given affection. Not like the affection Uzu and her children showed each other.
He had seen how Kimimaro leaned into Uzu’s hands, how Jugo bloomed when she kissed his
forehead, how Yugito had nestled into the woman’s body when Uzu had joined them on their futon
to sleep. How Kisame had let her brush his shoulder in a fleeting caress when she woke and found
him still on guard. How even Han, big, lumbering, clumsy Han had accepted the food she dished
out onto his plate with a small smile.

Rōshi remembered how Uzu’s hands had felt when she brushed the tears off his cheeks when
Yonbi cried. How motherly they had been. By contrast the hands of the young girls he had paid for
that were now caressing his chest, teasing his neck and stomach felt cloying and clammy.

Had he made a mistake?

* *

Finding Uzu wasn’t hard. She and her children hadn’t yet left Howling Wolf Village. Rōshi
skidded to a stop in front of them, his chest heaving but not from exertion. He went stiff as they all
stared at him in confusion and bewilderment. Kisame even peered behind him as if expecting to see
someone chasing after him.

“I want to.” Rōshi blurted out.

“Want to what pervert?” Yugito chirped, her eyes narrowed in a feline manner.

“What Uzu-sama said, I want to go with you.”

“Just like that?” Kimimaro said.

Rōshi nodded and looked to Uzu. She was the matriarch, her decision was final. She stared at him
and he bowed low, apologetic, sinking onto his knees and pressing his forehead into the ground.

“Please forgive my earlier actions, Uzu-sama. I have no excuse. But I would like to be better and I
would like to do better by myself and Son Goku.”

The civilians and shop owners in the street were all peering at him, he could hear them muttering
to themselves and he reined his temper back. He wanted this, wanted it as much as he wanted the
farm girl’s touch as a younger man, but in a much different way. This family unit, this freely given
and uncoerced love and companionship made him ache with wanting.

“You’re going to get dirty kneeling on the ground. Come along Rōshi.” Uzu said and swept over to
him, tugging him up and brushing his sleeves off.

“Are you sure?” Rōshi asked. He hoped he didn’t look as pathetic as he sounded.

“Stop asking or we’ll change our mind.” Kisame patted him on the back hard. “Uzu never lies.
Once she says something, she means it. So, get a move on.”
Rōshi smiled, a soft fragile thing not the usual broad and false grin he plastered onto his face.

Falling into step beside Han at the back of the group was one of the easiest things he had ever done.

*

Chapter End Notes

23/07/2020 will have no update of ITAV but the Ame Trio's side story 'Walk Beside of Me' will be posted in place of the usual ITAV chapter.

24/07/2020 will resume normal update schedule of ITAV with Roshi-Part Three: Uzu and gang leave the village and encounter something wild beyond the village's limits. There is a little chaos. Roshi meets more of Uzu's children and wonders how she has managed to collect so many. Does she get money off in shops for having a certain amount of offspring?
Roshi - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Uzu and gang leave the village and encounter something wild beyond the village's limits. There is a little chaos. Roshi meets more of Uzu's children and wonders how she has managed to collect so many. Does she get money off in shops for having a certain amount of offspring?

Chapter Notes

If you haven't checked it out already, please read Walk Beside of Me which links in to this chapter. It'll give clarity on some of the issues in this chapter.

Thanks as always for the bookmarks, subscriptions, kudos and comments. I've reached 200 subscribers on this fic which is awesome! Bookmarks wise only at 168 (i know some of these are private bookmarks and so don't count on the public view). Follow me on my tumblr if you want to see more about my writing process or have a chat. I love hearing from you because it really spurs me on to keep writing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rōshi

(Part Three)

*

Leaving Howling Wolf Village was easy enough. Rōshi slid into their group with the children effortlessly making way for him. He noticed that he was still getting the occasional watchful glare or disapproving shake of the head but hopefully the children would forgive (and maybe forget) his initial blunder with them.

Once they were beyond the village boundaries however they all felt an eerie sensation. It was the same feeling all of them had felt when travelling towards the village. There was something different, unusual, odd lurking in the land.

“The animals are afraid.” Jūgo announced softly.

The group stopped to listen. There were no birds singing, nor even simply flying overhead. No signs or sounds of animals rustling in the sparse woodland, no tracks in the late winter snow that barely coated the ground.

There was just the wind. The wind and the windswept trees and the mountains looming around them.

“I don’t like this.” Yugito announced. She was visibly uncomfortable and Rōshi could’ve sworn
her hair was trying to free itself of the intricate braids to stand on end. If he was being honest, his skin was prickling too. The red hairs trying to stand on end.

“Do we go back to the village and set out again tomorrow?” Kisame grumbled, his eyes peering around them.

“We’ve come quite a distance from Howling Wolf already.” Han pointed out. They had set off as soon as Rōshi joined them, having brought his pack along with him, and made good time away from the settlement. They could turn back but none of them really wished to return to the village. They wanted to move on and get away from it and the drug that seemed to be infiltrating the people slowly. Spreading like a disease and lingering in the air.

“We carry on.” Uzu said. She looked uneasily around them before marching onward. Her okobo were unusually silent as she stepped and Rōshi watched as she slipped her sleeve up and pressed her fingers to seals tattooed onto her arm.

They lit up with gold light and from them she drew a wakizashi and a parasol.

Rōshi saw her children readying themselves. Kisame pulled his blade off his back and began to unwind the bandages somewhat as he walked along. Yugito readjusted her pack on her back and tightened the straps so it couldn’t easily slip off if they did end up in a fight.

Han sidled closer to Jūgo, ready to scoop the young boy up if necessary, and Rōshi could see that he was preparing for a fight, rolling his arms and checking his armour.

Kimimaro trotted along next to Uzu, braiding his hair back and away from his face. He took pins out from the long sleeves of his black star-speckled and moon embroidered kimono and swiftly and confidently pinned the braids up tight to his scalp. Uzu drew a pair of katanas from her seals too and handed them over to the pale-haired boy.

Rōshi palmed his curved kunai into his hands. Within his mind he could feel Son Goku shifting agitatedly.

“Plan if something happens?” Rōshi asked Han as he trotted along next to the larger man.

“Fight?” Kisame snarked sarcastically from up ahead.

Rōshi bared his teeth at the sharp-toothed boy.

“I meant do you normally work in pairs or have certain strategies that I should try not to interfere with?”

“Kisame is our tactician.” Han said diplomatically. “Uzu-sama is a fuuinjutsu mistress. Once we’ve assessed the situation she usually employs a suitable seal. I mainly keep Jūgo and any younglings out of trouble and dart in to land attacks when I can.”

Rōshi listened carefully as the children outlined their abilities and roles in skirmishes. He wanted to be surprised that they were so skilful but from their kekkai genkai and prowess he wasn’t. Any village would be desperate to gain them as their own shinobi.

* 

The attack when it came was preceded by a lonely, mournful howl that rang off the cold, hard mountain stones surrounding them.
The wolf-like monster was fierce, wild and unpredictable. It didn’t look fully like a wolf, nor did it move on all fours like a wolf but sometimes rose on its rear legs and swung its human-like forelegs at them with devastating speed.

Rōshi found himself dodging like the monkey Bijuu sealed inside him, springing off rocks and chittering agitatedly. His lava release wasn’t quick enough to land a hit but he had managed to block the path behind them, causing the monster to run around the magma.

He followed Han’s advice and darted in to slash at the meaty forelegs with his kunai and was joined by Kimimaro wielding two katana simultaneously to great effect. Yugito and Matatabi (who had materialised) were a terrifying combination. The pair were slinking around and distracting the monster. Matatabi occasionally lunging to swipe at the beast’s hindquarters.

Rōshi kept an eye out for Jūgo who had retreated next to Uzu and was holding up her parasol as she drew on a large scroll she had pulled from her seals. The ginger boy was steady and firm, the parasol open and Rōshi had seen him deflecting chunks of stone with it and spinning it to deflect diverted kunai away from him and Uzu.

Kisame was barking out orders but Rōshi was getting frustrated. He didn’t understand why they hadn’t killed this beast already. There were three Jinchūriki here. And one of them had a Bijuu that could manifest outside their body. Matatabi was at least three times greater than the wolf-beast. It would be child’s play for her to squash it.

“Why haven’t we killed it yet?!” Rōshi chittered angrily and pressed himself flat to the ground as the beast’s paw swung at him. He felt the rush of air above him a split second after he had thrown himself to the ground.

“Rule Number One!” Kisame called out gleefully. He was having far too much fun. “No killing!”

“That’s a stupid rule for a shinobi!” Rōshi retorted. “Who’s rule is that?”

“Do you really need to ask? Uzu’s family, Uzu’s rules.”

Rōshi parried the monster’s long claw with his kunai and then yelped as Kimimaro used his shoulders as a vault to slash at the beast’s face, driving it back and making it howl in frustration.

“What are the other rules then?” He shouted.

“Rule One – no killing.” Kisame replied.

“Rule Two – no stealing or harming someone deliberately without due cause.” Han said.

“Rule Three – family always eats together.” Kimimaro cheered as the monster yelped when Han slammed into its bloodied flank.

“Rule Four – If Uzu-nee isn’t around Kisame is in charge.” Yugito scampered along with Matatabi at her heels. The two ducked under the monster’s belly and tripped it, sending it crashing to the ground.

“Rule Five – No one gets left behind but no one has to stay if they don’t want to be with the family anymore.” Jūgo called.

“Rule Six – All wounds must be tended to by someone other than yourself. Even if you don’t think it’s a big deal.” Kisame scowled.
“Rule Seven – Never forget that Uzu loves you.” Matatabi purred.

“Rule Eight – Never forget that you are more than those that might have been cruel or debased you in your past. You are unique and individual and important. You matter.” Uzu said and slid between Kisame and Han who had managed to grab the monster’s forelegs and were holding it still.

She slammed an ink-covered hand onto the beast’s paw and the ink spread over its stripy orange, black and white fur. Over legs, back, tail, throat, head and muzzle. The wolf-beast stilled and then glowed gold as the seal activated fully.

Seconds later it was sat on its hindlegs like a dog, with its tail wagging and panting happily.

“What in the…” Rōshi trailed off. He looked at Uzu’s family. They all seemed completely calm about the fact that what had been a raging beast mere seconds ago was now acting like a puppy, panting happily with its long, slobbery tongue hanging out.

“Fuuinjutsu mistress.” Yugito reminded Rōshi with a conciliatory pat on his forearm. She grinned as he gaped at Uzu who was patting (patting!) the monster on the snout.

“Will it stay like this?” Han asked curious.

“I don’t know. Hopefully. But its old, ancient even. I can feel it.” Uzu said, staring at the wolf-tiger creature that was now placid and yawning.

“Older than you?” Kimimaro teased. Uzu rolled her eyes.

“You know I’m older than the Bijuu. This is older than the Bijuu but not as old as me.”

“The animals say that it’s called Rōen. And they say thank you for making it less angry.” Jūgo piped up softly. He had a rabbit in his arms and two small birds were nestled in his hair.

“They are most welcome. It was a pleasure.” Uzu said and scratched her fingers on the rabbit’s head between its ears.

“Your pleasure. Don’t drag the rest of us into it.” Kisame moaned. “Whilst you were painting on your scroll and transferring your scribbles onto your hand the rest of us were working woman.”

“Shut up fish boy. You need the work out. You might end up getting fat if you don’t fight and then Shizune-nee won’t like you anymore. She’ll go out with one of the shinobi back on Uzushio.” Yugito teased. Matatabi rumbled with laughter next to her.

“Children. Don’t make me separate you.” Uzu warned.

“Do we leave Rōen alone now?” Kimimaro asked, bringing everyone’s attention back to the beast who had begun to leave their group, padding slowly and quietly back up the slopes of the mountains.

“We must. This is their home. We must carry on to ours.” Uzu said. “Hopefully Rōen will be calmer now. Their anger was making this area unpleasant and causing the discomfort. The seal mutes that disturbance within them. Over time, if left alone, Rōen could find true peace and calm and no longer infect this land with their ire.”

Rōshi watched as Uzu’s family shrugged, stretched, yawned and then gathered themselves to continue meandering back along the path, heading east once more.
“Just like that?” Rōshi called.

“Just like that. Good job though Rōshi. You were very helpful.” Uzu called back.

A small nugget of pleasure sank into Rōshi’s stomach. He rubbed his nose and trotted along next to Han.

Uzu-sama wasn’t too bad.

*

When they were crossing Fire, avoiding the battlefields and war over a month after leaving the Land of Medicine, Rōshi let out a scream (a very high-pitched scream) as a giant slug nearly crushed him.

The slug appeared out of nowhere, nearly landing on Rōshi who had been trying to empty his bladder into a stream. The slug vanished leaving a four teenagers, including one who reeked of blood. Rōshi swiftly readjusted his trousers before darting forward to catch the teenager who was bleeding.

“Where’s Uzu-kaa-chan?” The girl asked frantically. She didn’t have to wait long as Uzu and the others appeared summoned by Rōshi’s scream.

“I need the Jinchūriki to borrow power from their Bijuu.” Uzu said. She had assessed the situation swiftly and drew a spiral on the ground. “We’re going to transport back to Uzushio and I need your chakra to power the seal. I’m going to use mine to stabilise Nagato.”

Rōshi wondered how many children Uzu had. Did she get rewards for having so many? Money off in restaurants for large groups?

He found himself still thinking about Uzu’s large family even as Son Goku fed him power. He didn’t even notice that Son didn’t complain, for once, about sharing his power. And the monkey didn’t even ask for anything in return.

Rōshi did notice however, that Son willing giving power was a lot more pleasant than dragging it from the Yonbi. Maybe Uzu was on to something about working with Bijuu…

*

Chapter End Notes

Howling Wolf Village and Roen are canon in so far as they are part of a novel that was written for Naruto. It features Sasuke and covers the period between Itachi’s death and Sasuke deciding Konoha and the elders need to die. I’ve not read the whole thing, nor do I intend to, but it was a useful plot device. :D

Next Chapter - Roshi Part Four: Roshi has a keen appreciation for Tsunade. Yugito enlists him to help her meet a friend. Son Goku doesn't loathe his Jinchuriki as much.
Roshi - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Roshi has a keen appreciation for Tsunade. Yugito enlists him to help her meet a friend. Son Goku doesn't loathe his Jinchuriki as much.

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always for every subscription, bookmark, kudos and comment.

For more details on the Ame Trio and their time during the war, read Walk Beside of Me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rōshi

(Part Four)

* 

“Go jump in the ocean you monkey!” Tsunade screamed at Rōshi and he grinned back. He chittered a laugh, dodging her fist and climbing up into a tree.

She yelled up at him and he continued to laugh.

You know, one of these days she'll actually manage to land a blow. Yonbi said disapprovingly.

I know, but it'll totally be worth it! Rōshi replied. She's just so strong and powerful and smart and gorgeous and vulnerable and…

Please stop, you're going to make me sick.

You can't get sick. You're made of chakra.

I'm sure I can if I try hard enough. Yonbi sulked. Especially if you continue to wax on longingly about the Slug Princess. Isn't she too old for you?

Rōshi left the tree he had escaped up and leapt across to another, his hands catching the branch securely and swinging on through the woods until he reached the cliffs. He stopped swinging and crouched on a prominent rock to watch the fishing boats as they bobbed gently on the ocean.

Age is just a number. Besides, I like all women. Rōshi replied.

So, you say. I thought you were turning over a new leaf. Becoming more of a family man. Don’t human women like that?
I have turned over a new leaf, I no longer buy women’s time now! But that doesn’t mean I’m turning into a monk! Rōshi protested.

My mistake, you’re obviously a completely different person. Except for the fact that you’re panting after Tsunade like a dog for a bone.

Take that back! Rōshi yowled.

No. Stop acting like a dog and I will. Son Goku sniffed primly.

For the king of monkeys, you’re pretty boring. So proper and prim. Are all the legends of you causing mischief exaggerated? Or have you grown dull in your old age?

See if I heal you when Tsunade manages to hit you.

Rōshi cackled.

Since travelling with Uzu and her little ragtag group his relationship with Son Goku had greatly improved. It wasn’t easy, he still didn’t like the Yonbi a lot of the time and he knew the feeling was mutual, but they were working on it. It was a lot of two steps forward and one step backward, but progress was happening.

Son Goku had greatly improved once they returned to Uzushio and he was reunited with the land of his birth for the first time in eons. The monkey Bijuu was calmer and less prone to fits of anger. Rōshi had noticed his own temper was easier to control too now. Maybe there was some truth to Uzu’s claims about having a positive friendship between Bijuu and Jinchūriki.

Rōshi had seen the proof of it when Saiken and Utakata had worked together to rescue the Ame Trio (it was a surprise to discover that the newly famous group was comprised of more of Uzu’s children). In fact, all the Bijuu and their Jinchūriki had worked together to transport the whole group off the mainland and onto Uzushio, covering miles and miles in a split second.

Rōshi could understand why Uzushiogakure had been destroyed and the people slaughtered. There really wasn’t a limit to what one could do with seals and enough chakra.

But for now, with the Ame Trio recovering on Uzushio, Kisame and Shizune back on the mainland (supposedly going to buy medicines and medical equipment as well as finding Nagato’s mutt) Rōshi had a lot of time to relax and begin to mend his relationship with Son Goku.

* 

He was interrupted in his boat watching by Yugito who came hurtling up the path, her hair for once unpinned and disarrayed.

“What’s wrong Yugito-chan?” Rōshi drawled. She didn’t seem overly worried about anything and there were no alarm bells being rung.

“Rōshi-ji-chan.” She began in a sweet voice. His blood turned to ice. She was being sweet. That didn’t bode well.

“Just spit it out. You make me nervous when you give me those big eyes and that nice voice.” He shivered unconsciously, not noticing the pleased smirk on Yugito’s face.

“I want you to come to the mainland with me.”
“And why aren’t you asking Uzu-sama?”

“Because Uzu-nee is busy with Kabuto-kun and Jugo-kun. And Kimimaro-nii is busy with his apprenticeship and Konan-nee and Yahiko-nii are working and Nagato-nii still isn’t fully healed. And Han-ji-chan is helping with the rebuild. You’re the only one not doing anything.”

“I’m actually very busy.” Rōshi replied indignantly.

“Busy doing what?” Yugito asked.

“Thinking.”

“I’m sure that’s hard for you, ji-chan.” She said solemnly.

Rōshi bristled but didn’t respond. Matatabi suddenly materialised next to Yugito. The Nibi freaked him out. She was the best at staring competitions. She never, ever lost.

“Why do you want to go the mainland anyway? Can’t it wait until Uzu decides we need to set off?”

Yugito shook her head, her hair flying around emphatically.

“No! I need to do it soon! Or it’ll be too late.”

“Do what?”

She bit her lip and glanced up at Matatabi who had materialised in her larger version. Rōshi would swear she did it deliberately just to mess with him. Cats were such mental demons. They would mess with you just because they could. Yugito’s clowder had stolen several of his weapons, he knew they had but then the weapons had reappeared in different places when he mentioned it. He knew he hadn’t left his shuriken in his futon.

Matatabi flicked her two tails and leaned down to nudge Yugito reassuringly.

“I have a friend. He’s a Konoha shinobi. Well, it’s his birthday soon and I want to give him something.”

Rōshi blinked.

“You want to go to the mainland, into the war because you want to give your boyfriend a birthday present.”

Yugito flushed. “He isn’t my boyfriend.”

“Yet.” Matatabi purred softly and snickered when Yugito scowled up at her.

“Can’t you just wait? If he’s a Konoha shinobi he’s probably going to be near the war zone. Neither you nor I really want to be near there.”

“He’s not actually near the war currently. He’s in the village on the coast.”

“And how do you know that?” Rōshi drawled and looked at her from the corner of his eye. Yugito shuffled her feet and mumbled at the ground.

“Pardon?”
“Because I have one of my clowder keeping an eye on him.” She mumbled. Rōshi bit his lower lip. It was kind of amusing that she was keeping tabs on him but at the same time it was worryingly like stalking which he thought even Uzu might frown on.

“Umm, sweetheart, keeping tabs on your not boyfriend with one of your summons, is kind of weird.” Rōshi said gently.

Yugito’s head whipped up. “It’s not on him specifically! One of my clowder keeps watch near the village when we’re on Uzushio, kind of like a forward watcher and if suspicious shinobi or ones who would be interested in us come near they let me know. But they all know what Itachi-kun looks like so when he popped up nearby, they told me.”

Rōshi chittered. It wasn’t as bad as stalking, thank goodness. Although, Uzu giving a moral and ethics lesson to her hell spawn was an amusing idea.

“So, you want to go to the mainland and give your not boyfriend his birthday present before he skedaddles back to Konoha?” Rōshi summarised.

Yugito nodded and bit her lip.

“But I’m not supposed to go off on my own, last time I did that Itachi-kun had to help Matatabi and I escape from Kumo nin.”

Rōshi stood.

“Well if I go with you, you won’t be alone. And between the four of us we can handle anything.”

Yugito tilted her head onto one side. “The four of us?”

“You, Matatabi, me and Son Goku. Think that’ll be enough?” Rōshi caught Yugito as she leapt up and pressed a grateful kiss to his cheek.

“Thanks, Rōshi-ji-chan!” She squealed.

“Go on, get yourself ready. I don’t suppose you want him to see your hair in a mane?” Rōshi teased and deposited her back down. Her hands flew to her hair and she grinned sheepishly.

“He’s already seen it like this before.” She wrinkled her nose. “He said it looked tem-pes-tu-ous.”

She ran off back to the village. Matatabi and Rōshi followed more sedately. It would take the girl a while to get her hair tamed.

Rōshi nodded his head. “How old is this Itachi-kun?”

“Itachi-kun is twelve, turning thirteen.” Matatabi purred.

“Isn’t he a bit old for Yugito-chan?” Rōshi worried.

Coming from you that’s ironic. Son Goku muttered.

* 

Watching Yugito biting her lip and being shy was one of the most adorable things Rōshi had ever seen. Not that he would ever admit so. Not even under torture. He knew that Yugito could send her clowder to steal his weapons again, or worse…
Rōshi and Yugito had left Uzushio after informing Uzu. Tracking down the young girl’s not boyfriend had been rather easy considering he hadn’t left the seaside village.

“Hi Itachi-kun.” Yugito said with an awkward wave.

“Yugito-chan.” Itachi said and bowed.

Kid’s got class. Son Goku commented. Maybe you should take notes Rōshi.

Rōshi internally shushed his Bijuu, focussing his attention back on the drama unfolding.

“I am glad to see you well.” Itachi stood back up and looked at Yugito with a blank face.

“You look – well too. Umm, how’s the war going?” Yugito mumbled, her face flushed and her eyes wide. Asking a shinobi how the war was going wasn’t the best idea.

“I am well, thank you. According to my superiors the war should be over soon. Iwa and Kusa have been struggling since the battle of Kannabi bridge.”

It’s like he’s giving a report. Rōshi moaned to Son Goku.

“I see. Well that’s good for you and Konoha I suppose.” Yugito said.

“Indeed.”

There was a long pause.

“Did you need to speak with me Yugito-chan?” Itachi asked.

She stammered and blushed.

“I-I-I have something for you.” She forced the words out.

Itachi’s eyes widened in surprise. “For me?”

She nodded and held out an origami box, made of Konan’s finest origami paper.

“It’s your thirteenth soon isn’t it? Well, I just thought, as you were nearby, I mean not that I was following you, one of my ninneko spotted you, I wouldn’t have them follow you, I mean – it’s a birthday present. Happy Birthday.”

Itachi took the box and looked at her.

“Thank you, Yugito-chan.” He opened it and she squeaked protesting that he could open it later.

Rōshi peered over, craning to see the gift.

“It’s a bell.” Itachi said. The bell, akin to that usually seen on a cat, was made of a red metal and chimed sweetly as he rang it. When it rang a second chime echoed it, higher and brighter.

Yugito flushed and pulled at a braid tucked behind her ear. A smaller counterpart to Itachi’s bell was chiming from her braid. The two bells were emanating a dim gold light.

“It’s in case you need me. Not that I think you need me! But you know. If you wanted to talk or if you needed assistance. If you ring it, my bell will ring, and the glow will fade the closer we get to each other. It’s silly really.” Yugito explained and scuffed the dirt beneath her shoe.
“No. Its – a nice gift. Thank you.” Itachi smiled, a proper smile. Yugito’s eyes widened in delight. She lunged forward and rose onto her toes, pressing a kiss to Itachi’s cheek. The shinobi didn’t flinch, but his eyes did widen.

“Happy Birthday Itachi-kun.” Yugito squeaked out before running back through the village.

Rōshi watched as Itachi’s unoccupied hand rose to touch his cheek where Yugito had kissed him. There was a bewildered and wonderous look on his face.

Young love huh?

Young love indeed. Son Goku replied. You really should take tips, from both of them. Maybe Tsunade will finally give you a kiss if you stop being such a dog.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Yahiko, Konan & Nagato Part Two:
We find out some of what the Ame Trio have been up to during the Third Shinobi War. Yahiko has separation anxiety, Nagato's eyes are hurting and Konan is worried about her boys (as always).
Yahiko, Nagato & Konan - Part Two

Chapter Summary

We find out some of what the Ame Trio have been up to during the Third Shinobi War. Yahiko has separation anxiety, Nagato's eyes are hurting and Konan is worried about her boys (as always).

Chapter Notes

Thanks as ever for the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments. Brief synopsis of relevant events in Walk Beside of Me:
Ame Trio were in Rain to try and bring peace to their home nation (as in canon). Things didn't go their way and they were betrayed but this time Konan was with Utakata and Saiken and they escaped from Hanzou's men, leaving a decoy in her place. Yahiko and Nagato believed that Hanzou had Konan and so when Hanzou ordered Nagato to join him or die (remember Hanzou saw some of Nagato's powers when they were younger) Nagato stabbed himself to save Konan and Yahiko. Konan, Utakata and Saiken arrived after causing a distraction and Utakata and Saiken used a teleportation seal to get them to Uzu (Roshi - part three). Uzu and the other Jinchuriki then borrowed power from their Bijuu to teleport to Uzushio and Nagato was saved by Shizune and Kabuto.

If you want more detail check out Walk Beside of Me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yahiko, Nagato & Konan

(Part Two)

*

Their brush with death had frightened all three of them. They had always been aware of death, their formative years having been surrounded by it and the war, with the potential of their own deaths lingering on their periphery. Their own mortality was a constant concern, would they die by being caught in conflict, die of starvation, die of sickness.

But after meeting Uzu and being part of a family and having siblings that they would protect and defend and whom would protect and defend them equally as fiercely, and having food at every meal – no longer going hungry and a mother who would care for them when they were sick, their own mortality seemed to fade. Not that they believed they were invincible, but they were less concerned with death.

After Konan and Nagato had almost died, Yahiko could barely let them out of his sight. His heart would race and sweat would soak his clothes as soon as they had been parted for too long.
Tsunade-oba-chan said it was a fear, one that would hopefully fade with time, but she was no Yamanaka so she couldn’t be sure.

Yahiko began to try and separate himself from Konan and Nagato, spending short periods of time away from them in his workshop, working on his gliders or making adjustments to his weapons. Gradually he had been able to build up the time they were parted from mere minutes to hours.

He didn’t bother testing if he could go a day without them. They had never spent a day apart, not since they first found each other. If he had his way they would never be parted for such a length of time.

He knew he wasn’t the only one struggling with it, but Konan and Nagato seemed to cope with it so much better, then again they were both stronger than he was.

When he woke with a strangled cry, surging up from their futon and his hand clenching at a kunai handle Nagato would wake and coax him back down to sleep with soft, lazy, loving kisses. Konan would slip out of their bedroom on the worst nights and return with tea and toast. There was something comforting in sipping warm drinks and munching on buttered toast sweetened with jam.

And if he lingered in the early hours of the morning in their futon, exchanging sleepy kisses and watching the growing light illuminate the sharp bones of Konan’s face and set Nagato’s hair ablaze, in that moment before truly waking, well none of them complained.

*  

Nagato, despite having stabbed himself in a rather dramatic declaration of love, was happy. He had noticed however that his eyes were aching more, and his powers seemed to have increased since his brush with death. Konan and Uzu-kaa-chan had suggested letting Tsunade take a look at them and so he was back in a hospital bed after a whole bunch of tests, waiting for the famous kunoichi to return with the verdict.

Lying on the hospital bed and staring up at the blank ceiling he contemplated suggesting to Tsunade that they paint the ceiling with something nice. He couldn’t imagine lying her for weeks ago with only a white surface to look at. Maybe Utakata could do one? A nice brush and ink drawing. Something soothing and relaxing. Or even just any colour other than white.

He was running through a list of possible paint colours (having discarded beige, terracotta and periwinkle amongst others) when Tsunade returned with Uzu and his lovers.

Konan automatically came to his side and squeezed his hand tightly, Yahiko leaned over to press a kiss to his forehead before shuffling the younger man forward and sliding in behind him. It was secretly (but not really secretly as everyone knew) Nagato’s favourite place to be, with Yahiko’s arms wrapped around him and leaning back against the older man.

“So, what’s the verdict Tsunade-oba-chan?” Nagato asked with a smile. His heart sank when Tsunade didn’t smile back. “That bad, huh?”

“Not bad, necessarily Seaspray.” Uzu reassured him and leaned over to brush his hair back from his face. Her thumb rubbed the apple of his cheek before she sank down into the chair next to his bed.

“Have your eyes always looked like this Nagato-kun?” Tsunade dragged a chair over and plonked her feet up on the bed.

“As long as I can remember.” Nagato said warily.
“Well, there are some, discrepancies with your eyes. Has Uzu-sama ever told you about your eyes?”

Nagato shook his head. Uzu shrugged when Tsunade scowled at her.

“I didn’t not tell him. It just isn’t important like you think Tsunade-chan.”

“I’d say that the fact he has the Rinnegan, the eyes the Sage of Six Paths had, the most powerful eyes in existence is pretty damn important!”

Nagato felt his heart stop.

“What?”

“Probably not the best way to break that news Tsunade-oba-chan.” Konan scolded and squeezed his hand reassuringly.

Tsunade scowled at Uzu but the red-head shrugged nonchalantly.

“Hagoromo would have agreed with me. The eyes aren’t that important. It’s what you do with them. And Nagato learnt how to and when to use his eyes. The fact that they were the Rinnegan is irrelevant. He isn’t the Sage of Six Paths, nor is he Jiraiya’s child of prophecy – yes I remember you telling me about that stupid prophecy – he is Nagato Uzumaki, child of Uzushio, lover of Konan and Yahiko, sibling to many. He is Nagato, not Hagoromo.”

Tsunade rolled her eyes. “Alright, I understand why you didn’t tell him.”

“Umm, I don’t.” Yahiko piped up.

“Because having the same eyes as the Sage of the Six Paths would put pressure on Nagato to live up to such a reputation.” Konan explained. “We both know how Nagato is, he would have felt he had to do more, be more. Instead he’s just our Nagato, which is infinitely better.”

Yahiko shrugged behind Nagato and nuzzled his nose against the younger teen’s neck. “Nagato has always been and always will be Nagato, whether or not you have famous eyes or not.”

Nagato flushed at the praise and squirmed as Yahiko kissed his neck softly.

“Not in front of Uzu-kaa-chan and Tsunade-oba-chan!” Nagato hissed but it did nothing to hide the smirks from Tsunade and Uzu.

“Anyway, returning to the matter of the Rinnegan.” Tsunade steered the conversation back to Nagato’s eyes. “The reason they are hurting you is because they are not yours. They are not your eyes. The DNA markers that I have extracted from them is not the same as the DNA in the rest of your body. Also, your eyes are not the right shape, there are slight discrepancies in the eye shape and the socket.”

“What does this mean?” Nagato asked. “Did someone take my eyes and give me these?”

“That’s my guess,” Tsunade said softly. “It was probably done when you were young, young enough for your body to adapt to the new eyes and for your body to form around them and accept them. But these eyes are old too, much too old to have been children’s eyes when they were transplanted. My guess is that your brush with death and your recent heightened emotions have been causing the Rinnegan to activate unconsciously. You mentioned noticing things in higher detail and being distracted by birds and other things in the distance?”
Nagato nodded.

“I think your subconscious has been activating them as a defence. Hopefully, once you are healed and are more relaxed your mind will ease up and you won’t be straining them and draining chakra. For an Uzumaki you have large reserves and a high healing level but constant draining and chakra use is wearing on anyone, even an Uzumaki.”

“Is there anything else we can do?” Konan asked.

“You could wear a blindfold for a few hours during the day?” Tsunade suggested. “If you aren’t being visually stimulated then that could reduce the strain and pressure on your eyes. I’m guessing here to be honest. The only other eyes I know of that can cause discomfort like this are the Uchiha’s Sharingan and the odd Hyuuga Byakugan but they are both outclassed by the Rinnegan and it’s been a while since I even worked with on one from those clans.”

“A blindfold huh? Sounds like it could be fun.” Yahiko purred under his breath in Nagato’s ear. The flush on the pale teen’s neck deepened. He could always trust Yahiko to lighten the mood.

Konan hummed thoughtfully.

“What is it Raindrop?” Uzu spoke for the first time in a while.

“There was a man, in Ame. He made us all uncomfortable. Kept going on and on about power and peace and a perfect world. But, he mentioned Nagato’s eyes and the power they held. I wonder if he knew, knew that Nagato has the Rinnegan.”

Uzu straightened up.

“Did he gave you his name?”

“No. He didn’t, just said he wanted to be our friend. But he was creepy Uzu-kaa-chan. He had a mask on that covered his face and only one eye.” Konan shivered.

“Hmm. That is unnerving.” She agreed.

“He can’t have followed us onto Uzushio. You’d know wouldn’t you Kaa-chan?” Yahiko said.

“I would and no, no one is on Uzushio who isn’t supposed to be. But I will keep ask my network to keep an eye out and report any information on a masked man with one eye. Konan-chan, if you can give me a more detailed description that would be helpful.”

Konan nodded. Tsunade swung her feet off Nagato’s bed and stood up, stretching her back and arms and yawning.

“For now, the best we can do is let Nagato rest his eyes, that means no sparring or training for a while. Try the blindfold, it might work but let me know. If you get a headache drink the herbal tea I gave you and have a lie down in a dark room. Now, I’m not going to tell you not to have sex,” Yahiko and Nagato groaned and Konan scrunched her eyes shut. Uzu chuckled wickedly.

“But no strenuous or kinky stuff. Keep it simple for now.”

“Thanks, Tsunade-ba-chan. Good to know.” Yahiko muttered and nuzzled his head on Nagato’s shoulder.

“It’s what I’m hear for!” Tsunade said cheerily. “Now, dinner time. Uzu-sama do you know what
Kisame was cooking this evening?”

Nagato watched as the two women left, chatting happily as if all the stressful conversation prior hadn’t happened.

“So, blindfolds…” Yahiko leered once they were sure their mother and aunt were gone. “Sounds like it could lots and lots of fun, don’t you agree Konan?”

“Definitely.” Konan purred and leaned in kissing Nagato firmly on the mouth.

Nagato sank into the kiss. He was pretty sure that the blindfold was supposed to be medicinal, if it came with side perks, he wasn’t going to complain.

*

Konan sat next to the window and stared out at the moon and stars. Behind her she could hear her boys snoring and snuffling in their slumber, content and happy. Something had woken her, a fear, a sense of terror and for a long time she had lain on her side and watched them sleeping, Nagato curled up into Yahiko’s chest, wrapped up tightly.

Unease had sent her slipping from the under the thin blanket they were using due to the summer heat and over to curl up by the open window and stargaze. Her tongue rubbed the back of her labret piercing.

Her earlier conversation with Uzu-kaa-chan had been unpleasant. The mother figure she admired and adored was greatly angered by Konoha and Ame turning on her children. It was the first time Konan had ever been afraid of her Kaa-chan and really felt her power. Konan knew, instinctively, that Uzu-kaa-chan would never hurt her but realising that her mother figure was more powerful than the Bijuu, had been startling.

“Konan.” Yahiko murmured sleepily. She turned and saw him drinking her in, bathed in moonlight. “Come back to bed sweetheart. We’ll sort it out in the morning.”

She smiled fondly and crawled over, slotting herself behind Nagato and pressing her skin against his. The youngest of the three lovers hummed happily and she pressed her lips to his spine.

Yahiko was right, for now the best thing she could do was be with her boys. The worries could wait until daylight when they would seem smaller.

*

Chapter End Notes

Please don't comment asking for more clarification on the Ame Trio's time in Rain. I will just tell you to read Walk Beside of Me. Although rated explicit you can skip the sex scenes and I tell you how to do that in the opening notes.

Next Chapter - Uzushio Part Five:
Mama Uzu is feeding her children, the Third Shinobi War has ended and Uzushio feels peaceful with some of their children returned.
Uzushio and Uzu have a talk about Uzu's human body and Yugito makes presents for all her family.
Mama Uzu feeds her children, the Third Shinobi War has ended and Uzushio feels peaceful with some of their children returned. Uzushio and Uzu have a talk about Uzu's human body and Yugito makes presents for all her family.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

A few of you have been asking for ages of the family. On my Tumblr I've posted the age chart which gives the approximate ages of all the characters in each 'year' of Uzu's life. So if you want to know how old the characters are now (in Uzu's 8th year) then go check that out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Uzushio

(Part Five)

*

Uzu stared around at the full dining table, at all her children cheerily talking and passing food around and felt her human heart swelling.

This is what we wanted. She said to her soul.

It looks wonderful and it feels just as good. Her soul replied and sent a breeze to carry the scent of them into the dining room through the open doorways.

Uzu didn’t know how humans could contain such strong emotions in their squishy bodies. She felt as if she was going to burst with love and adoration and devotion. She would die for these people. She would die for her villagers who had elected her their leader (even though she was really bad at paperwork and organising things).

Part of her hoped that the worst was behind them, the Third Shinobi War having ended and peace returned to the mainland, but she knew that it probably wasn’t true. Her long years of consciousness observing humanity grow and stumble had taught her that humans weren’t infallible and sooner or later they reverted to their old ways.

Wars to end all wars didn’t exist. Greed and hunger for power lingered in the shadows of hidden villages and conflict was seemingly unavoidable. She recognised that it was true of nature also. Predator and prey clashed every moment. The birds nesting on the cliffs lived with the knowledge
that their chicks could tumble from their nests and be clashed on the rocks below having only lived a few short weeks. There was no intermediate, no peace in the natural world. There was balance however and Uzu felt she had achieved something like it with her mismatched, weird and beautiful family.

Kisame had outdone himself with their feast and they had all chipped in, in some way (although Uzu had been forbidden from doing anything except watching as they all knew of her poor cooking skills). There were dishes piled high with vegetables, bowls of rice, miso soup, grilled fish, prawns in a sweet yet sharp sauce, oysters, pork glazed with sauce and many other delicacies.

No one ever wanted hungry at Uzu’s house and that was the way she wanted it, forever.

*

Her people whispered when she passed by, some of them calling her by the name she had chosen others murmuring the one gifted to her by her enemies. The elders of the village likened her to a god, sharing memories of stories told to them in their youth of Hagoromo and the Bijuu. Stories she had told them as restless children.

It wasn’t a pleasant feeling, being so revered, and Uzu was grateful to her foundlings for sniggering at the worship that some of the citizens placed upon her. Kisame was always quick to bring the awed civilians back to earth and the sight of her carrying Kabuto and wiping his face with a handkerchief (just like the human mothers did) always seemed to remove barriers.

Her favourite retreat had become the ruined temple that had yet to be rebuilt. Part of her wished that it would be returned to its former simple glory but another part enjoyed the peace and quiet she found there. The villagers wouldn’t tread within the temple proper. They said the temple was haunted, that the spirits of the deceased gathered there. The fact that the foxes liked to gather there too only added to the temple’s mystery and awe.

“If you go in the temple,” The children of the villagers whispered to each other. “The kitsune will catch you and lead you astray.”

Uzu was the only one on the whole island who would tread the weathered floorboards and sink into the shadows of the temple ruins. Escaping from paperwork was easy when your retreat was a haunted sacred space.

It was funny really. Uzu knew there was nothing heavenly about this place but there was definitely a different feeling here. She suspected that it was because Hagoromo had birthed the Bijuu there. The civilians and shinobi of Uzushiogakure could instinctively sense the nature chakra that brimmed within the temple grounds. Even centuries after the Bijuu’s birth nature chakra was still drawn to and welling up on the spot.

When she was feeling depleted and drained, Uzu liked to lay down and soak up the energy replenishing her own. The foxes used the place for the same reason. It was one way they could gain an additional tail. Soak in enough nature chakra and control it and they could form an additional tail. Tamashī gained his third tail by doing so and the silver fox had pranced around in front of Uzu showing off for hours.

Uzu adored her foxes and enjoyed her peaceful time with them, basking in the sunlight and snuggling in amongst the pile of tails and soft fur.

The temple was also the only place on the island where only Matatabi and Saiken could go. Sometimes they would accompany Uzu and spend hours talking about their pasts, mourning their
freedom and sharing tales of the Jinchūriki they had been imprisoned in.

* 

The only other place on Uzushio where more nature energy gathered and swelled was Uzushio’s soul, the cavern deep within the centre of the island. Leading Han and Rōshi into her soul felt different to bringing Yugito and Utakata.

Tamashī had been more nervous too, his three tails flicking agitatedly and his teeth bared occasionally at the two Jinchūriki.

Altering Han and Rōshi’s seals was harder than those for Saiken and Matatabi. Uzu had been drained and spent a long time floating in the pool afterwards whilst the Bijuu and the Jinchūriki interacted as individuals with separate bodies and consciousnesses for the first time.

_That body is getting worn._ Uzushio hummed to her.

_I know. But I’m not finished yet. It’ll last a few more years at the least._ Uzu replied to her soul.

_Our children are almost all returned. Only the Bijuu and a few human children remain absent. Will we go to Konoha?_

_Hmm. I don’t know. Kushina and those in Konoha seem settled. Kushina’s husband is the new Hokage. I do not think she would want to return. Her life is in Konoha now. The others appear settled too. The Bijuu are a different matter. We will find them and offer them sanctuary on their motherland._

Uzushio thrummed around her and Uzu resonated with her soul.

_We shouldn’t interfere with the humans._

_But we have. And we will continue to do so._

_We know. But we will outlive them. It is the way we are._

_Everything ends. We will end one day._ Uzu opened her eyes and stared at the lights of her soul floating in the air.

_We must be careful. We can sense disturbance. There is a dark energy on the mainland. It has been growing in strength these last few years. It could defeat us._

_We will be cautious. But we will protect what is ours._

In this both heart and soul were unanimous. Their children were everything.

* 

One of Uzu’s favourite things to do was to sleep in a huddle with all her children. They too enjoyed the ‘puppy pile’ as Shizune had named it. Utakata was usually the instigator, the teen pulling Uzu down wherever they were and nuzzling against her side. Kabuto would follow too, his young body sometimes unable to keep up with his fast mind, eager to nap. Jugo enjoyed snuggling with Uzu and lounging with his head over her heart, the steady thuds in his ear lulling him to sleep. Yugito would collapse over Uzu’s legs like a cat, her limbs askew and wild just like her. Kimimaro would flop down elegantly – and the boy was truly turning into a beauty all long limbs and graceful movements, unlike Utakata who seemed uncomfortable and unsteady as his body changed –
tossing his silver-white hair over his shoulder and resting his head on Uzu’s arm. The Ame trio would arrange themselves on the edge of the puppy pile, forming their own but their feet, hands and limbs would be interwoven with the other children. Kisame usually took up a position near Uzu’s head, sometimes when he was feeling particularly soft, lifting his mother figure’s head to rest on his leg and spreading her hair over his legs.

The adults Uzu had adopted wouldn’t join the puppy pile but would bask next to the slumbering pile. It became a habit they all indulged whenever and wherever the mood struck. It became a common sight for the citizens of Uzushio to stumble over a pile of slumbering children and Uzu on the beaches, in the meadows, amongst the roots of the trees, in the central courtyard of the village.

There was even a pot for guessing where the next puppy pile would be spotted.

And the puppy pile inevitably attracted animals, both domestic and wild. Genbu-chan had made it her mission to find the warmest spot in the pile and claim it (much to Kabuto’s dismay as the tortoise would often end up invading clothing and then be dropped when whomever she had invaded stood unaware of the tortoise in a sleeve or tucked against their chest). Kōgō and Mamoru (Nagato’s dog) had come to an uneasy truce with regards to slumbering, especially when Yugito summoned members of her clowder and they joined in bullying the dog.

Then there were the Bijuu who were occasionally the foundation on which the puppy pile formed. Uzu’s children had unanimously decided that Son Goku was the comfiest of all the Bijuu with Matatabi following in a close second. Unfortunately only Utakata and Uzu could really put up with Saiken’s slime and Kokuō didn’t like staying still enough to puppy pile.

*It was a simple existence but one that brought pleasure to most on Uzushio. The advent of peace on the mainland lifting everyone’s spirits and the shinobi who had remained on Uzushio, wary of entering the nations and drawing attention began to travel once more – seeking out small jobs and missions but beginning to rebuild a network of jobs and informants. Shinobi once again sported the Uzushio swirl on their person, even if they did not wear hitai-ate.

Yugito had been inspired by the bells she had made for Itachi and herself and the seal work Uzu had helped her with. Towards the end of their rest on Uzushio she finished a secret project and presented each of her family with one of a special set of beads she had made.

Each bore Uzu’s name and had a seal that thrummed with Uzushio’s energy. The girl had sought Uzu’s permission to soak the beads in the soul cave and Uzushio’s soul merged with the seal Uzu designed.

“Uzu-nee helped me. Now these beads will always be warm as long as Uzu-nee lives. I made them to show we’re a family and that Uzu-nee is ours.” Yugito explained shyly as her family turned their individual beads over in their hands. Each was uniquely carved to represent the individual it was for.

She had spent a long time deciding what each of her siblings, aunts and uncles would get. The Jinchūriki had been simple – their beads were carved to represent their Bijuu and bore the Bijuu’s name as well as Uzu’s.

Yahiko, Nagato and Konan had all received droplets made from different stones, representing their Ame origins and the nicknames Uzu had given them. Kabuto’s was an eye because her little brother was always curious and watching. Kimimaro had a crescent moon because her newest nii-
chan was pale like the moon and elegant. Tsunade-oba-chan had a slug with only one tail, Shizune received a miniature Tonton which the pig was very jealous of.

Kisame’s had given Yugito the most trouble. Whilst she often teased him, she truly adored her first and oldest brother. Finding a shark tooth on the beach had been a stroke of luck.

Her oldest brother wore it proudly around his neck, looking like a warrior from myths who had battled sea gods and emerged victorious. If he gave Yugito an extra long hug, the only one who noticed was Uzu and she smiled at her children’s love.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Shisui Part One:

Shisui is concerned about his younger cousin. Itachi has a rendezvous and Shisui accidentally on purpose stabs his cousin's not girlfriend. Mama Uzu is remarkably calm about the whole situation, the rest of the family - not so much.
Shisui - Part One

Chapter Summary

Shisui is concerned about his younger cousin. Itachi has a rendezvous and Shisui accidentally on purpose stabs his cousin's not girlfriend. Mama Uzu is remarkably calm about the whole situation, the rest of the family - not so much.

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to every single one of you who has made it this far and bookmarked, subscribed, commented or left kudos!
406 kudos so you all should know what that means by now! Double update!
Shisui part one and two tonight, part three tomorrow.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shisui

(Part One)

* 

Itachi had been greatly changed since the war. Shisui wondered if he was the only one who had noticed. His little cousin had never been the most outgoing or expressive child and Shisui had worried that the war would make him withdraw further. Instead the opposite seemed to have happened. Itachi was more patient and Shisui could have sworn he saw the normally stoic teen smiling the other day.

Unfortunately, Shisui hadn’t been able to see what Itachi held in his hand that caused such a dramatic emotional expression before the younger boy hid it away.

Nevertheless, that incident (Itachi smiled!) had only spurred Shisui’s curiosity and he found himself trailing around behind or alongside Itachi whenever they were both free. He watched as Itachi interacted with his teammates and knew his cousin was being considered for Anbu. He saw how their younger (and distant) cousin, Izumi, would smile at Itachi and offer him dango. Itachi never really smiled back at Izumi however and Shisui wondered if the boy even realised that she had a crush on him.

What was most interesting however was Itachi’s discovery that he was going to become a big brother. Shisui knew that Mikoto-oba-san and Fugaku-oji-san had been trying to have another child. Mikoto-oba-san had miscarried once before the war when she had almost reached full term and another baby had been born stillborn during the war. Itachi had almost been a big brother without his knowledge. Shisui wondered if he would have known what to do with a younger sister. To be honest he wondered if Itachi would even know what being a big brother entailed.

Itachi seemed almost excited however when his mother laid his hands on her stomach and he felt
the curve of it that signalled a new life growing inside her. He had stared down at her belly with amazement.

Shisui noticed that a few days later Itachi went out on a mission for the clan, out to some old ruins that had supposedly unearthed some Uchiha related artefacts believed lost. Shisui offered to tag along, keep Itachi company and help him look (after all two Sharingan are better than one) but Itachi had refused his company and fiddled with something in his hand, glancing at it before squirreling it away again.

“No thank you, Shisui-nii. I will be fine on my own. It is only a scouting mission.” Itachi said bowing and then leaping onto the rooftops of the Uchiha compound and heading towards the village gate.

Shisui, whilst normally a fairly easy going (for one of the Uchiha anyway) and relaxed shinobi felt suspicious. Itachi never refused his company on a mission. Never. They always treated the missions seriously but also as training exercises and mini competitions. Whilst Shisui wasn’t at Itachi’s level of genius he was still pretty clever and could keep up with his younger cousin, one of the few shinobi in the whole village who could.

“What’re you up to Itachi-kun?” Shisui murmured to himself, his eyes staring off in the direction of the main gate.

Mind made up Shisui flickered and raced after Itachi, careful to stay far enough back that Itachi wouldn’t notice him, after all, he knew his cousin’s limitations well. It was his job as best friend and older (wiser and more handsome) cousin to keep an eye on him.

If Itachi was involved in something and hiding it from the Village and Clan… Well, Shisui wanted to know about it.

*

Considering they had been at war not long ago, that Konoha was undergoing a change in leadership and there was the potential for their enemies to seek them out, Shisui was appalled at Itachi’s almost blasé jaunt through the forest.

His young cousin seemed to be merrily hopping his way through the trees. Shisui wondered if the birds would start singing as he passed or maybe squirrels would wave. The sun was shining and Itachi was positively beaming out energy.

Shisui was almost certain something serious had happened. Had one of Itachi’s enemies been killed? Had he found a new technique with his Sharingan? Had he improved one of his genjutsu (not that the little shit needed to improve his genjutsu abilities, Shisui still hadn’t forgiven him for making him believe that he was being nibbled on by squirrels… The end of the world would come about by squirrels, he was sure of it)? Had he gained a new weapon from Nekobaa?

The ruins Itachi had been ordered to explore by Fugaku-ji-san came into view, over half a day’s journey (shinobi travelling that is) from Konoha. Much to Shisui’s relief Itachi paused and scoped the area out with his Sharingan and didn’t just launch himself into the crumbling structure.

Shisui kept himself hidden, further back in the trees and watched carefully and closely as Itachi descended and began to meander amongst the ruins.

Nature had a strong grasp on the old building, vines and leaves covering much of the stonework and trees and bushes had destroyed the foundations, their roots making the surface uneven and
rough. Wildflowers grew from cracks between stones and Shisui could smell wild roses on the breeze.

Itachi pulled back on some of the vines, exposing ancient carvings, older than most Shisui had ever seen before. There was little written word instead the carvings were a series of weather worn images that had been ravaged by wind, rain and time. Some were undecipherable, even with the Sharingan, but others clearly showed a nine-tailed fox.

Shisui swallowed. This was no Uchiha temple, this was something older, something related to the Kyuubi. Something he didn’t think Itachi should be messing with.

There was a noise from deeper in the ruins and Shisui’s Sharingan focussed on the direction it had come from. Itachi had heard the noise too and was watching, waiting.

From his higher vantage point Shisui spotted a young girl, creeping over the top of the ruins, moving silently and effortlessly. She was bare foot and almost on all fours, moving in a bestial way. Her eyes were fixed on Itachi and Shisui held his breath. Surely, Itachi had seen her, sensed her?

Horror overcame him and he forced it down, his training surging to the forefront. Shisui used his signature move and flickered, faster than any other shinobi (except the Yondaime of course) and slammed into the girl who was leaping down towards Itachi’s exposed back.

His kunai sank deep into the girl and she yowled and twisted away from him. Shisui drew his sword and continued his pursuit as the girl snarled at him. Her blonde hair ripped from it’s elegant updo and writhed in the air as an enormous burst of chakra emanated from her.

Shisui flickered again, dodging the cat paws formed of blue chakra that the girl swung at him with her right hand whilst her left braced the kunai in her stomach. His Sharingan saw every detail and noticed the opening before she had even made it.

One more flicker and she would be dead, his blade through her throat. He flickered and was startled by the clang of steel on steel.

“Itachi?” Shisui breathed as his eyes fixed on his younger cousin who had appeared behind the girl and was blocking his blow with his own blade. Itachi’s free arm had pulled the girl close into his body, away from Shisui.

“Stop Shisui! It’s not what you think!” Itachi barked. The girl hissed in his arms but the overwhelming chakra pouring from her began to ebb.

“She was attacking you!” Shisui protested and stared at the girl, his tomoe wheeling in agitation. She curled her lip back and bared her teeth in a silent snarl.

“She was playing. Yugito-chan wouldn’t hurt me.” Itachi explained. Shisui looked back to his cousin only to see his eyes widening in surprise.

“I suggest,” An older woman’s voice came from behind Shisui and he froze. “You withdrew your blade from Yugito and Itachi. Or else.”

Shisui swallowed. There was a blade at his neck. He hadn’t sensed the woman coming up behind him. Not a sound, or change in the breeze, or a smell or even the feel of her chakra. He could however feel the cool metal resting against his skin.

Shisui pulled his blade back from Itachi’s and his cousin used the opportunity to pull the now
panting and sweating girl back and further away from Shisui. The older Uchiha raised his hands, his sword held loosely in his hand. The woman took the blade from him but to his surprise she re-sheathed it in his scabbard on his back.

“My apologies Uzu-sama. I did not realise Shisui had followed me.” Itachi said to the mysterious figure behind Shisui.

Her blade withdrew but Shisui remained focussed on Itachi who had lowered himself and the girl to the ground and was checking the kunai buried in the girl’s stomach.

“Aww.” The girl panted. “I liked this kimono.”

“What do I do Uzu-sama?” Itachi asked.

The woman swept around the still frozen Shisui and knelt down next to the girl.

“Is Matatabi ready?” Uzu asked (Shisui assumed this was the woman Itachi had been referring to) and the girl nodded.

Before anyone could do anything else the girl pulled the kunai out from her own body. Her mouth opened and a high-pitched, angry howl filled the ruins. Shisui gaped in horror as blood poured out and stained the fabric of the lavender kimono and deeper purple obi.

There was another surge of that almost oppressive chakra and the cut in the fabric where the wound was, began to produce steam and a hissing sound. Shisui’s Sharingan saw a foreign chakra swarming around the wound – which was deep – healing it. It was like no kekkai genkai Shisui had ever seen. Within mere seconds the major damage was already being reversed. New cells being grown, damaged tissue, muscle and arteries repaired. Within a minute the inner wound was almost gone, and the chakra was finishing off on the uppermost layer, binding the skin together and erasing all signs of injury.

Soon all that remained of Shisui’s apparent mistake was the sweaty and pouting girl in the bloodstained kimono.

“All done?” Uzu checked.

“My apologies Uzu-sama, Yugito-chan. My cousin jumped to conclusions. I am greatly aggrieved that you were injured Yugito-chan.” Itachi apologised once again and bowed his head in regret.

Yugito wrinkled her nose and patted Itachi’s arm that was still wrapped around her waist.

“No need to be so formal Itachi-kun. It was a mistake. Besides, I don’t think we can be too angry with someone who wants to protect you like that.”

“But you could have died.” Itachi protested. The girl shrugged.

“The day a single kunai takes me out I’ll probably be already close to death. You know it takes more than that to hurt me.”

“Still. I do not – like seeing you injured.” Itachi admitted. Yugito’s face lit up, beaming at him and a flush forming over her cheeks.

“Now, now Little Crow. You should be careful.” Uzu teased. “You’ll make Yugito-chan want to kiss you again.”
Shisui’s mouth dropped open as Itachi blushed and looked away. Itachi blushed. The world most definitely must be coming to an end. His formal, genius, idiot with relationships, stoic cousin was blushing like the teenager he actually was.

“Can someone explain what’s going on here?” He whined. “Itachi’s blushing, you’re not dead and how did you get behind me without me noticing? Has the world ended? Am I in a genjutsu? I don’t understand!”

Uzu laughed loudly her teeth bared with mirth.

“Oh, I like this one.”

Another voice deeper in the ruins cursed.

“You don’t need anymore! Leave that one alone! Besides he stabbed the brat, it’s not the best first meeting is it?!”

“Shut up fish boy!” Yugito howled.

Shisui checked. He wasn’t in a genjutsu. Maybe he’d gone mad? That was the only reasonable explanation left.

Insanity was obviously the answer.

*

Chapter End Notes

Shisui - Part Two will be posted shortly!
Shisui - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Shisui meets the rest of the family, they don't kill him (thankfully). Everyone gets a bit of a history lesson from Mama Uzu.

Chapter Notes

Double update! If you haven't read Shisui Part One go back and read first!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shisui

(Part Two)

*

After meeting the rest of Yugito’s siblings and being formally introduced, Shisui still wasn’t certain he hadn’t gone insane.

There were so many of them. Including Tsunade-hime whom Shisui vaguely recalled from his youth (and he felt old referring to only a few years ago as his youth). They crowded around, some sending Shisui evil glares and muttering under their breath at him, but he grit his teeth and smiled innocently as if he hadn’t impaled one of their siblings/family only a few minutes ago and nearly (actually) caused an incident.

“I’d say it’s nice to meet you all, except nobody has answered my questions!” Shisui whined. He looked at Itachi with pleading eyes, but his traitorous younger cousin was preoccupied with helping Yugito.

“Itachi!” He sulked and the younger teen rolled his eyes. “You’re so different recently. Is this girl why?”

Shisui gasped and slapped his cheeks with his hands. “Is Yugito your girlfriend?!”

Itachi flushed. Yugito too got a delightfully pink hue to her tanned skin. Shisui mentally cackled.

“I, she’s, we’re not, I mean, we, she’s not my, not that I wouldn’t, but you know.” Itachi fumbled before turning to look at Uzu with wide eyes. “Uzu-sama, could you answer Shisui’s questions please?”

Uzu rolled her lips inward, smothering her laughter. She nodded a couple of times.

“I just have one question for you Itachi, why are you exploring these ruins?”

Itachi’s face fell, his mission face came into play and Shisui felt his own mirror it.
“It was a personal mission. For the clan.”

“I see. May I ask why the Uchiha clan is interested in an old temple that the Sage of Six Paths disciples built?” Uzu replied calmly.

“The Sage of Six Paths?” Shisui whispered. “But this was rumoured to be an Uchiha ruin. From the warring states era.”

“It’s far older than that.” Tsunade said. She had joined Uzu’s side and was peering at the crumbling walls. “I remember my grandfather bringing me here when I was young. It was a ruin then, not as bad now, but still not somewhere that the Uchiha clan would have lived years before. There was too much decay already from what I can recall. The carvings were clearer then too. This is a temple for the Kyuubi.”

“So, the Sage’s disciples built a temple to worship the Kyuubi?” Shisui asked. He was rather confused. “What does the Sage have to do with the Bijuu?”

Uzu’s brow furrowed. “Do you not know your history? How the Bijuu were born from the Sage of Six Paths?”

“Say what now?” Shisui’s eyebrows flew up on his forehead.

Uzu’s upper lip curled in a sneer.

“Of course not. Trust humans to forget. I’m almost unsurprised that Madara used Kyuubi and Hashirama and Mito sealed him away. How do you live with such short lives and selective memories?”

Uzu stomped off deeper into the ruins. Her younger children scampered after her, but not before shooting Shisui more angry glares. The older Uchiha lifted his hands defensively.

“It’s not my fault!” He protested. Itachi gestured for him to come along and he joined his cousin and his cousin’s not girlfriend as they traipsed along. The older members of Uzu’s motley group brought up the rear. Shisui pretended he couldn’t feel Kisame scowling at him and that the shark-toothed man’s stare wasn’t making sweat bead on the back of his neck.

“Why is Uzu-sama so upset? And why do you call her Uzu-sama? You only call the Hokage ‘sama’ you don’t even call the elders that.” Shisui hissed at Itachi and noticed Yugito snort.

“Uzu-sama has earnt my respect.” Itachi replied.


“She treated me like a normal person.”

“Huh.” Shisui hummed. “I can sort of see how that would make you respect her. But at the same time I don’t.”

“You know, considering Itachi-kun said you were a genius too, you don’t seem that smart.” Yugito piped up.

Shisui’s face fell and he looked at the snickering girl (whom he no longer felt guilty for stabbing). He pouted petulantly and diverted his attention to the ruins.

Further into the inner sanctum the carvings had been better preserved and were no longer just the
Kyuubi. There were other stylised animals with multiple tails – the other Bijuu Shisui presumed – and there were human like figures too.

The innermost room was the most intact although the roof was long gone and nature had reclaimed the space long ago. Uzu’s group settled down around a semi-permanent camp. They had a fire with cooking items set up and bedrolls and tents were dotted around too.

Kabuto, Jūgo, Kimimaro and Utakata all settled down in one tent and began reading books, quite content to seemingly ignore their uninvited guests. Yugito slipped into another tent with Shizune and Shisui assumed they were going to sort out the girl’s clothing. Uzu settled down in a patch of sunlight and the adults joined her, Itachi dragging Shisui along with him to kneel and listen to Uzu.

“Pretty nice setup you’ve got here.” Shisui commented. “Are you wandering travellers?”

Han snorted. “Uzu-sama rarely stops wandering.”

“How come I’ve never heard of your group?”

“You have Shisui. Or rather you have heard of Uzu-sama.” Itachi sighed and pulled out his Bingo Book flipping through it beyond the Great Nations pages to the rear of the book where the lesser nations and unaffiliated nukenin were listed. One of the newest additions Shisui had only briefly glanced at stared up at him when he was handed the book.

“You’re Kishi Bojin?” Shisui asked.

Uzu shrugged. “I didn’t pick that name.”

“Huh. I don’t know whether I’m impressed or even more confused.”

“That seems to be your default, a state of constant disarray.” Tsunade snarked. “Considering you’re the infamous Shisui of the Body Flicker you really aren’t very bright at all.”

“Hey! I take offense to that.” Shisui barked weakly. He wasn’t an idiot, going up against one of the Sannin was not something he wanted to do. Not even to satisfy the curiosity burning inside him prompting him to find out if he could win. Just because he had the urge, didn’t mean he was going to satiate it. He could demonstrate self-control.

His fingers twitched and Itachi sighed heavily, knowing his older cousin too well.

“She will beat you into the ground and I will not stop her or help you.”

“You know I would, kid.” Tsunade smirked.

“Before you descend into childish fights about who’s stronger, faster or whatever,” Uzu interrupted their staring match. “I will answer Shisui’s questions.”

Shisui bounced on his knees excitedly. At least some part of his curious appetite might be assuaged.

“Right, so the first one I want an answer to is… How did you get behind me? I didn’t see you with my Sharingan, I didn’t sense or smell you. Not even a trace of you and forgive me, but you don’t move like a trained shinobi.”

Uzu laid her hands in her lap demurely.

“I am not human.”
“O-kay…” Shisui drew out the word. “What does that mean? You look awfully like a human to me. You have internal organs and everything.”

“You may use your Sharingan but you will see that whilst I have a human body my energy, my chakra is not that of a human. It is nature energy. Akin to the power those who achieve Sage status can use and access, except all of my energy comes from nature. I am made of it.”

Shisui eagerly activated his Sharingan and examined Uzu’s chakra pathways. The woman didn’t just have energy rushing through her, but it seemed to inhabit all of her body now that he was looking closer and more focussed.

“If you’re made of chakra energy, then what are you?”

The explanation that followed left Shisui speechless.

“So, Yugito-chan didn’t die because she’s a Jinchūriki? And there are other Jinchūriki here, now? And the Yondaime doesn’t know that he has four Bijuu on his doorstep?”

“Well he has one inside his village, so I imagine he’s probably preoccupied with that one and hasn’t given a single thought to where the others are.” Uzu said dryly.

Shisui chuckled and shrugged. “I suppose not. But have you really not told anyone Itachi?”

“I saw no need. Uzu-sama and her family pose no threat to Konoha. She would not harm the village because it is not in her nature, but there are also Uzushiogakure villagers who managed to escape the massacre residing there. It would not be in her interests to uproot them or harm the place they have grown to call home.” Itachi replied.

“Huh, I guess not.” Shisui accepted a cup of tea from Nagato, who looked rather like Kushina-san now that Shisui looked properly. “What brings you to this ruin?”

“We were passing by when Uzu remembered about this temple. She wanted to see it for herself. Then Yugito decided she wanted to see her boyfriend-”

Yugito’s protestations interrupted Kisame but he grinned and shoved her away. “So, we decided to stick around. And we’re not violent unless provoked, unlike some shinobi.”

Shisui laughed and scooted himself further away and tucking himself next to Tsunade. The woman snorted and sipped at her cup of tea.

“Hagoromo’s disciples built temples in the locations Hagoromo decided to send the Bijuu.”

“Hagoromo?” Itachi took his cup of tea from Nagato and thanked the teen.

“You know him as the Sage of the Six Paths. But he was Hagoromo to me. He came to rest on us, near the end of his life, when he decided to separate the Ten Tails into the Bijuu. Jūbi was a great chakra construct who threatened all life in this world. Hagoromo and Hamura, the Sage’s younger twin brother, both fought Jūbi for many months. Eventually they defeated it and Hagoromo sealed it within himself – in the process becoming the first Jinchūriki.”

“Woah. The Sage was a Jinchūriki?! Is that why he was so strong?” Shisui was mesmerised to the story and he wasn’t the only one. All of Uzu’s children had gathered around, even those who contained Bijuu and would have heard some of this story before.

Uzu shook her head and wrapped her arms around Kabuto who had crawled into her lap and was
leaning back against her to listen to the story. Kimimaro and Utakata sat either side of her and snuggled in against her with Jūgo cuddled up on Kisame who took the young boy’s presence without complaint. Yugito had joined the Ame trio and was letting Konan redo her hair whilst Yahiko and Nagato lounged with their heads in her lap.

“Hagoromo’s powers were strong and his own. He did not need Jūbi’s power. When he sealed its energy inside himself, he used his power to encase the husk, the remnants of its body, in stone. It was so large that it could not remain on earth and he cast it up into the sky. It stays there to this day, circling the earth. You would know it as the moon.”

“How big was this tailed beast?” Tsunade asked and sipped her tea, wishing it was sake.

“Bigger than the Kyuubi. Bigger than all the Bijuu put together.”

“That’s not depressing or intimidating at all.” Rōshi grumbled and Han made an agreeing noise.

“What did the brothers do next?” Kabuto piped up.

“Well, Hamura decided that the moon needed to be guarded so he went up to the moon and remained on it, eventually having his own children who would continue to protect and guard the Jūbi’s husk.”

“You know,” Shisui said dramatically. “This is definitely not what I thought I would be learning today. You’re telling me there are people living on the moon?”

“Probably, unless they all died out in the last few thousand years.”

“Has anyone got anything stronger than tea?” Shisui begged.

*  

Chapter End Notes

I will eventually explain how the Jubi came into being in Uzu-verse. But its not super important at the moment so will probably be explained later in the fic. Needless to say Kaguya isn't an alien in my version.

Next Chapter - Shisui Part Three:
Shisui is developing a headache. Mama Uzu really needs to learn how humans (and Bijuu) will react to huge information drops. Matatabi is the voice of reason.
Shisui - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Shisui is developing a headache. Mama Uzu really needs to learn how humans (and Bijuu) will react to huge information drops. Matatabi is the voice of reason.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shisui

(Part Three)

*

Shisui was tired. It was barely even mid afternoon and he’d already had to process a lot so far today.

1) Itachi could keep secrets.
2) Itachi had a sort of but not quite girlfriend
3) Aforementioned not girlfriend was a Jinchūriki
4) Shisui had stabbed her and she hadn’t died because of previously implied Bijuu
5) There was the spirit of a nation wandering around rescuing children and people like a fairy tale hero
6) Everything he thought he knew about the Bijuu was turning out to be wrong
7) He might not be insane yet, but after today he’d go get his head checked, just in case

*

“Right, so there are moon people.” Shisui said. “I can accept that. But why did the Sage make the Bijuu? Why didn’t he just make another Jinchūriki for Jūbi?”

“Are you serious?” Utakata said scathingly. “Shinobi treat the Jinchūriki and Bijuu like weapons. Can you imagine what they would do if the power of all nine Bijuu was combined and stored in one person? Wars would be eternally fought over controlling them.”

“Utakata-kun speaks true.” Han rumbled. Shisui was almost shocked that the large and surprisingly quiet man had spoken up. “Besides, it takes strong individuals with resilience and large chakra reserves to contain the Bijuu. Not just anyone can become a Jinchūriki.”

“Is that why Rin Noharu died then?” Shisui murmured thoughtfully to himself.

Itachi’s eyes whipped to his. The group fell silent.
“I thought Hatake killed her?”

Shisui’s face twisted uncomfortably.

“Yeah, that’s the rumour going around the village. But I heard from Gai-senpai that Mist put Sanbi in her. She threw herself in front of Hatake because she knew and couldn’t contain Sanbi properly. She didn’t want to make it back to Konoha and destroy the village. Hatake tried to get her to Minato-sama and Kushina-san but they were attacked before that could happen. Rin made Hatake kill her.”

“I see. Then the villagers and shinobi are being unkind and false when they call him Friend Killer?”

Itachi looked unimpressed and his lips were pressed tightly together. Shisui rested a hand on his shoulder lightly.

“Sort of. There’s also the fact that Obito died and he was on Hatake’s squad.”

Both Uchiha looked uncomfortable but didn’t fail to notice the disapproving glances passing between Uzu’s family.

“Yagura is now the Mizukage and the new Jinchūriki for the Sanbi.” Kisame announced. “He’s been the Sanbi Jinchūriki for a couple of years now and Mizukage for almost as long.”

Uzu hummed thoughtfully.

“Well, I guess the power of one Bijuu is terrifying enough. I can understand why the Sage split such a power into smaller beings.” Kimimaro said in a hushed voice. He knew the effects fear had on people when someone or something was stronger than them.

“Indeed. Hagoromo hoped that dividing the power into the nine Bijuu would create balance. By birthing the Bijuu he also however, turned them into individuals with their own thoughts, consciousness, will and desires. None desired to become Jūbi again. Hagoromo hoped that with their individuality and with aid from his disciples who would hopefully continue his teachings on after his passing that the Bijuu and humans could learn to work together and become friends.”

“That definitely didn’t happen.” Kisame snarked. Jugo in his lap nodded emphatically.

“No. The humans were afraid of the Bijuu, even as they learnt how to twist chakra to hurt each other, which wasn’t what chakra was supposed to be for.” Uzu’s voice was slightly disapproving. “However, that is another matter entirely. The Bijuu kept to themselves and tried to stay away from the humans. You do breed rather quickly however and began to encroach on their territories, sometimes even seeking them out. Eventually they could go unnoticed no longer.”

“That’s sad. That the Bijuu just wanted to be left in peace and yet we sought them out.” Kabuto furrowed his brow.

Uzu smiled fondly and stroked Kabuto’s hair, pressing a kiss to his temple.

“I always thought so. Things came to a boiling point when Madara Uchiha placed Kyuubi under the influence of his Sharingan.”

The whole attitude of the group changed instantly. Uzu’s family looked at both Uchiha who had been sitting with them, quite relaxed with sudden suspicion. Some of them were even displaying fear and animosity towards Shisui and he felt his blood turn cold.
There was no way he could take them all in a fight, not one that he could win anyway. He rose to his feet in a partial crouch, Itachi mirroring him, both of them prepared to flee in necessary. The desire to activate his Sharingan was prominent. Unleashing it when the group was so wary would potentially be an incendiary.

Yugito slipped from her place amongst the Ame trio to stand in front of Itachi and Shisui, her arms spread wide as she placed herself between them and her family.

“Itachi-kun would never do that.” She said firmly. “Matatabi and I trust him.”

A blue and black cat of rippling flames surged into being and sat on Itachi’s shoulder. The younger Uchiha didn’t even flinch at her sudden materialisation.

“Yugito is correct. I will trust the Little Crow. He has aided myself and Kitten before.” Matatabi purred and nuzzled Itachi’s head before starting to groom him.

Were the situation not so tense Shisui would have snickered at the sight of Itachi willingly submitting to being licked by a Bijuu. Snickered and maybe hyperventilated that a Bijuu was treating his cousin like a kitten.

More chakra beings materialised and Shisui swallowed loudly. Four Bijuu, and only one seemed actively on their side. The slug-like one simply looked confused and torn between siding with Matatabi and remaining separate from them all.

Yonbi and Gobi however were not so easily pacified. And they had materialised in much larger bodies than Nibi. Shisui wondered absently when the Bijuu had gained the ability to appear outside their Jinchūriki but decided that was a question for a time when he wasn’t facing down an angry monkey and a horse-like creature.

“Just because you trust them doesn’t mean we should.” Yonbi chittered angrily.

“The little one might be trustworthy, but what about the other one. We already know he has a tendency to attack first. Or have you forgotten what he did to Yugito already? It makes me uneasy Matatabi.” Gobi said. She sounded more concerned than incensed.

“Kitten trusts Itachi. I will trust her and him. I do not believe Little Crow would have allowed the other one to remain near us if he was untrustworthy. Or do you think Kokuō that Itachi wishes to use us?” Matatabi purred pleasantly, as if her judgement wasn’t being called into question.

“I see your point sister.” Kokuō replied.

“I don’t!” Yonbi barked. “We all know what happened the last time one of us got near an Uchiha! And he got sealed away and then we all got hunted down and sealed away too after being traded for peace that never came!”

Shisui swallowed again. It sounded like Madara had caused more problems for the Bijuu than he had for their clan. Where the Uchiha were only facing the mistrust and apprehension of one village, the Bijuu (and by proxy their Jinchūriki) were despised and desired simultaneously by nearly every nation.

“I swear, that I will never use my Sharingan on any of you.” Itachi announced.

The Bijuu fell silent and turned to him.

“You can’t promise that boy.” Yonbi snarled. “If I were to attack you now you would use it on
“I would not.”

“In the future you might face one of us across a battlefield. Or if not us one of our siblings. You would have to use the Sharingan then.” Kokuo pointed out.

“I will not.”

Shisui could not make the same promise. He didn’t know these people. He didn’t know them the way Itachi did.

“I will say that I will not use my Sharingan on any of you unless you leave me no choice. That is what I can offer for now.” Shisui said.

“What do you think Mother?” Rokubi burbled. “Can we trust these Uchiha?”

Uzu had remained silent, watching her children tailed and human regarding the Uchiha with suspicion.

“It is sad that your mistreatment at the hands of humans has made you so suspicious of them. Neither Itachi nor Shisui are Madara. Until I mentioned that Madara had used his Sharingan you had forgotten he was the impetus for your capture and imprisonment. Yet the second you came to the realisation that our two guests possessed the same ability you were filled with fear, hatred and suspicion.”

Uzu’s gentle voice held no judgement. It was soft and calm and steady, almost monotone. But Shisui saw the Bijuu (apart from Matatabi) flinch and look away.

Silence fell on the camp once more. The humans of Uzu’s family settled down, leaving her to sort out the situation. Their mother/sister figure stood, Kabuto in her arms and walked over to the Uchiha who had stepped around Yugito to speak with the Bijuu.

She looked into Itachi’s eyes unflinching and then into Shisui’s. This close Shisui could see specks of a darker shade of blue, almost black, in the woman’s irises. Her gaze was as strong as the ocean and Shisui felt the force of her power and intensity of her stare hit him like a tidal wave. He would not buckle.

“I would not put you in harms way. Do you not trust me?” She asked the Bijuu, turning away from the Uchiha once more. Shisui breathed in slowly once she was no longer looking at him. He saw Yugito snickering out of the corner of his eye.

“You know we do Mother.” The slug bubbled and waved his eyestalks around worriedly.

“Then trust me now. I would not allow Shisui or Itachi to harm you. And, if they did, I would set you free. After all, their power cannot rival mine. So, will you stand down?”

The three Bijuu acquiesced to their mother without any further protests. She smiled and turned to the Uchiha once more.

“My apologies. I did not anticipate such a reaction, or I would have handled it more delicately. I forget that even though my tailed children are not human they act far more human sometimes than I.” She bowed her head slightly in apology.

“Thank you, Uzu-sama.” Shisui said gratefully. He was relieved he wouldn’t have to fight a Sannin
and the six others listed in the Bingo Book and Uzu’s other children whom he all guessed had some skill, let alone the Bijuu and the woman herself.

They all settled back down onto the ground once more, Matatabi sliding off Itachi’s shoulder to lounge between the two Uchiha in a larger form. She rubbed her head along Shisui’s thigh, and he waited for a moment before holding his hand out. Matatabi eyed his fingers with her odd eyes before tilting her head and letting it make contact.

Her flames were warm but did not burn and Shisui chuckled as she manoeuvred his fingers to the back of her ear and optimum scratching opportunity.

“Have you forgotten we are immense and terrifying chakra beasts?” Yonbi said with a sigh.

“You’re just jealous Son Goku. You want scratches, ask your pervert Jinchūriki.” Matatabi rumbled through content purrs.

“I’m good.” Yonbi snarked but leapt up transitioning into a smaller version of himself to sit on Rōshi’s shoulder.

“I was wondering, how fast are you Shisui of the Body Flicker?” Kokuō trotted over with a gleam in her eyes. “Do you fancy a race against the fastest Bijuu?”

Shisui grinned. Uzu-sama was truly fantastical. She’d turned a frankly dire situation around so quickly and now he was getting an opportunity to race against a being of chakra and wind.

Maybe today had been a lot to process but he wasn’t going to complain (much).

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kushina Part Two...
Chapter Summary

Kushina is pregnant and she can't wait to meet Naruto. She tells him stories of Uzushio. She tells them to her figurative and literal guard dog too because he's always listening. And she begs when she can't tell Naruto stories anymore.

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment. I never thought this story would intrigue and be enjoyed by so many of you. It is truly humbling.

Sorry for this chapter?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kushina

(Part Two)

*  

She was so excited. She was going to be a mother. And Minato, her beloved, goofy, strong, silly, adorable husband was going to be a father. She was ecstatic, you know?

The only thing that would have made her even happier would have been the opportunity for her parents and her siblings to get to see her baby. To see how happy she was, even though she was a Jinchūriki. But her family had all perished in the Fall of Uzushiogakure. Her Tou-chan and Kaa-san would have fallen defending the village, both fuuinjutsu masters who were clever and strong too.

Her oldest sister would have died defending the village too, using her chakra chains until she couldn’t any longer, her short red hair plastered to her forehead. She probably fell with her squad, her teammates who were almost as close as family. Her younger brothers, the twins, too. They were both prodigies and sneakier than the foxes on Uzushio. They would have made sure that as many children as possible could hide from the attackers. They would have set traps and fought as a tag team. But Kushina knew that if one of them fell, the other would have followed soon after, probably in a suicidal move. Her twin brothers were so dependent on each other. They would never have survived without the other.

She knew none of her family made it off Uzushio. The few survivors who had made their way to Konoha, less than five, had told her that Uzushio had saved them, transporting them away and dispersing them across the mainland. Teuchi-san who had carried his pregnant wife into Uzushio’s soul, his back cut open and bleeding from defending her, had told her that none of her siblings made it into the sacred cavern.
But she wouldn’t let her child grow up without hearing about their grandparents, their fierce aunt and their sneaky uncles. She told them stories when she was alone, (alone but for Kakashi, her fierce and wounded guardian) of her homeland and her family and their history.

“It was so beautiful, running on the ocean in the setting sunlight and seeing the ocean turn as red as the cliffs. I loved it you know. But I love you more.” She crooned to her stomach, rubbing her hands over her growing belly.

“You know, Uzushio talked to me, I told you that before, didn’t I? She used to tell me when the turtles would hatch, when a new fawn had been born, when the cherries were ripe, where the wild raspberries were, when the best time to go gliding was. She told me of the first on Uzushio, the shinobi who built our village. You’re part of Uzushio, even if you aren’t born on her, you know?”

Kushina glanced out the window at Kakashi who was perched on the railing, his masked face apparently transfixed by butterflies fluttering around him. She was glad Minato had put his only remaining student onto guard duty. Not that she needed it. She was Kushina Uzumaki. The Red-Hot Habanero. Jinchūriki of Kyuubi. Wielder of Uzumaki Chakra Chains. A fuuinjutsu mistress to rival Minato – even if her husband was flashier than she was with his sealing prowess.

She didn’t need a bodyguard because she was pregnant. But Kakashi needed to see that not everything was hopeless, and that new life could come from great loss. So, she told the little eddy in her stomach about her home and her family and she made sure Kakashi could hear. She had lost everything too – she knew what it was like. Her heart ached in sympathy for the boy.

If she had also managed to terrify and subdue several villagers into retracting the vicious slurs and demeaning rumours they had spread about Kakashi, she blamed it on mothering instincts that were blooming inside her. Defending and protecting Kakashi was practice (and an honour).

*  

There was one thing Kushina hadn’t told her growing whirlpool and Kakashi. She didn’t even tell Minato because although he had tried to understand her connection to her homeland, he never could. Hi no Kuni and Konoha just weren’t the same as Uzushio. They weren’t alive in the same way.

She knew that Uzushio remained alive. She had wondered if the spirit of her home had perished saving her people. There had been no whispers carried on a salty breeze, no reassurances of their presence in the night when she couldn’t sleep. There had been no sign that Uzushio was still alive.

She had spoken to a few other survivors Teuchi and his wife (who had lost their first child due to complications), Shiranui who had come to Konoha as a single mother with a toddling boy in her arms and set up a shop selling weaponry with a civilian Uzushiogakure child as her assistant. They all said that Uzushio had fallen silent too. That they hadn’t heard them since the Fall.

But, then, years later, there was a whisper on the breeze.

_We are here. We have not forgotten. We are whole once more, our power restored. I will come. You are not alone. We are here. We are here. We are here. We are alive. We have missed you, our precious child._

Kushina had wept when she heard the whisper. She had stumbled during a sparring session with Minato and he had managed to send her flying and thought her unwell when tears streamed silently down her face. Her misstep had been caused by the voice of her homeland calling to her.
Teuchi-san had heard the voice too. Shiranui-san and Genma-kun as well. They had all heard Uzushio’s voice and they rejoiced and celebrated the renewal of their home with celebratory ramen (although Genma-kun hadn’t really understood, Uzushio’s voice being only a faint memory from his formative years and absent for much longer).

In the times when Kushina was truly alone, when Minato was snoring away in the middle of the night and the Anbu guarding them were paying attention to threats outside their house (because Kushina was a badass fuinjutsu mistress who knew how to put seals on her home to prevent eavesdropping and unwanted entry) Kushina would whisper to her baby about Uzushio and tell them to listen for the whispers.

_We are here. You are part of us. We are here. We are connected. I will come. We are here. You are part of us. We are here. We are here._

Kushina also spoke to Uzushio, her thoughts connecting with her once home for fleeting moments but enough to share that she was happy and well and safe. She told Uzushio of her baby and felt the spirit’s joy at her news.


*  

On her last mission outside of the village, which really wasn’t a mission rather a vacation to the Land of Hot Springs, Kushina accompanied as always by Kakashi had seen a large family. A strange family. They were an amalgamation of unique individuals, none of them appearing to be biologically related but she could see they were a family of choice at the very least.

There had been a woman, a mother, carrying a silver-haired young one.

For a moment Kushina had thought the woman to be her mother, raised from the dead. Her heart stopped and her throat constricted with the urge to shout out.

Then the woman turned, and the similarities had faded away until Kushina no longer saw her mother’s image superimposed over the woman’s features. She still seemed familiar but a slight twinge in her belly distracted Kushina’s furiously working mind.

Their eyes met and Kushina smiled at the woman.

“Congratulations.” The woman said and gestured to Kushina’s slightly protruding stomach. “I hope you have a happy pregnancy, I’m told carrying a child is interesting.”

“I’ve already had the sickness. I can’t even eat ramen at the moment.” Kushina laughed and rubbed the back of her head. “But I’m excited to be a mother you know. I just hope I’m a good one. I want my kid to be healthy and happy and I don’t know if I can be a good mother.”

The woman cocked her head to one side and regarded Kushina with a knowing smile. The child in her arms regarded Kushina with a similar expression and she grinned at the imitation.

“I think you’ll be a great mother. You are worried about it now, so surely that’s a good sign. Besides, there isn’t a mother alive who doesn’t worry about being a good mother. As long as you love your child you have a good place to start.”

“They aren’t even here yet, but I already feel like I would and could do anything for them, you
know?” Kushina placed her hands over her belly. Kakashi flared his chakra from his hiding place. Kushina glanced at the woman. “I have to go I’m afraid. I have a mission to complete.”

“Of course. Good luck. And I’m sure you will be a fantastic mother.”

Kushina grinned. “Believe it!”

*

Childbirth was the worst thing Kushina could recall. It was worse than being injured by weapons. It was worse than Kyuubi’s angry, hateful chakra roiling around inside her. But it was worth it, to meet Naruto. To hold him in her arms. She couldn’t wait and she wouldn’t let Kyuubi ruin that moment either.

Naruto’s strong cries were the most beautiful sound she had ever heard. She was exhausted, holding onto the last of her strength to make sure Kyuubi didn’t break free (and oh how Mito-sama must’ve felt the same when she was pregnant and giving birth) but all she wanted was to see Naruto.

“Is he okay? Minato?” She panted and looked to her husband who was watching Biwako with attentive eyes.

“He’s amazing Kushina!” Minato breathed, his attention returning to the throbbing seal on her belly. “You’ve done so well. We’re parents.”

“We are.” She sighed and smiled happily. She didn’t think anything could break the swell of joy in her.

I have a baby boy. An Uzumaki, a child of Uzushio and Konoha. I did it Uzushio! She thought in her head.

Uzushio’s joy reflected back to her faintly and Kushina felt empowered. She was a mother. A real mother.

*

Kyuubi being ripped from her was worse than childbirth. Knowing that she only had a short time left to live was even worse. Knowing that Naruto would grow up without a mother nearly tore her apart. Knowing that she would be leaving her child behind was worse than anything and everything else.

Kushina! Kushina! We feel your pain! We hear you Kushina! Uzushio whispered faintly.

Kyuubi’s claw through her was nothing. She smiled down at Naruto, her tears and blood mingling with Minato’s and dripping onto her child. She was a mother. She had protected her child. Just like Uzushio had.

She spoke to Naruto, telling him all the things she could think of – but it wasn’t enough. She wanted more time. She wanted to see him grow. She wanted to hug him. She wanted to kiss his forehead one last time, feel his baby soft hair, stroke his chubby Uzumaki cheeks.

“I’m sorry Minato! I took up all your time!” She sobbed. Her beloved husband’s arms were wrapped around her, protecting Naruto just as fiercely as she had.

“Don’t worry.” Minato spluttered but she could hear him smiling. “You said it all.”
Uzushio, help my baby. Look after him, please? He’ll need you, you know?

Kushina! We will come. We will care for Naruto. He is of us. He is ours as he is yours.

“Naruto.” Kushina smiled and bid her baby farewell.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Konan Part Two: Konan is a spymistress and she has some news. The family heads for the Land of Mist and Kirigakure when some of Uzu's children are betrayed once more and one is lost forever.
Konan - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Konan Part Two: Konan is a spymistress and she has some news. The family heads for the Land of Mist and Kirigakure when some of Uzu's children are betrayed once more and one is lost forever.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the subscriptions, bookmarks, kudos and comments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Konan

(Part Two)

* 

Konan was used to life changing quickly. She enjoyed it. Aside from the bad parts like Nagato and Yahiko almost dying, not being able to bring peace to Ame and gaining siblings and aunts and uncles because humans could be horrible, life was pretty good.

She and her boys (her boyfriends, which always made her heart thrum excitedly when she thought of or referred to them thus) were on par with Anbu shinobi now. They'd trained and honed their skills, determined not to be put in a similar situation where one of them could die. And they never, ever separated. Not for long periods anyway.

Of course, they would spend hours apart, sometimes all of the daylight hours, but they always came together at night. To cuddle, to do more, to sleep.

Konan had learnt a lot in the 8 years since Uzu had adopted them. She was stronger, smarter and more cautious now, but she was just as dedicated to her boys and her Kaa-chan as she had always been. Her cautious nature and more cunning smarts had led her to take over Uzu-kaa-chan’s informant network. She was now the Spymaster for Uzushiogakure and for Uzu’s family.

Information flowed to her easily through a special origami paper she had designed that could allow her informants to write a message and then fold the paper into an animal or winged beast and with a small pulse of chakra the origami would come to life and return to her wherever she was.

She now knew secrets Daimyo and villages all over the nations would kill to have. And it was all stored away, ready to be used when best suited her. Knowledge was power. Knowledge like the Daimyo of Tea had four mistresses and they didn’t know about each other, like Kumo was hungry for kekkai genkai and shinobi from various nations with unusual abilities or kekkai genkai had gone missing, like Orochimaru had been lurking around the Land of Rice and he had supposedly gathered a group of overpowered shinobi. Information on each of the nations, the daimyo and the
villages rested in Konan’s possession.

Lately there had been disturbing rumours from Mizu no Kuni. The new Mizukage had apparently undergone a personality change. A severe one if the rumours were to be believed. One that had taken a proud, strong and young Mizukage – a Jinchūriki and made angry and cold.

She held the paper with the newest details in her hand and glanced up at Uzu across the campfire. She knew Kaa-chan had been intending to head to Kirigakure at some point to meet with the Mizukage and see if he would be amenable to getting to know the other Jinchūriki. The only reason they had not yet gone was Utakata and Kisame, both of them were wanted by Kiri. This news she held in her hand would potentially overrule her concern about Kisame and Utakata.

“Kaa-chan.” She murmured softly and Uzu looked up from her shamisen which she had been playing softly whilst the rest of their family slumbered.

“Yes Konan-chan?”

“I have some news, and it isn’t good.” Konan moved to sit next to Uzu, leaning against her in a way she hadn’t since she was quite a bit younger. Even as a grown woman with lovers and her own powers she still found Uzu’s presence and touch reassuring and comforting. Kaa-chan’s power was always present, now that she had the bead Yugito had made for her imbued with Uzushio’s nature energy, but basking in Uzu’s power that hummed within her always relaxed Konan. She knew it was the same for her other siblings.

“One of my informants in Kiri, well, they’ve written that the Mizukage has gone mad. That he’s ordered Hunter nin and Anbu to find shinobi and civilians with kekkai genkai and… kill them.”

A log broke on the fire with a sharp crack, startling Konan.

“That is concerning.” Uzu replied. “I would normally say that there is no such thing as good or bad news but this constitutes as bad news.”

“What’re you going to do Uzu-kaa-chan?” Konan murmured and rested her head on her mother figure’s shoulder.

“I think I will be going to Kiri.”

“You’re not going alone.” Konan said firmly.

“It will be safer if I do.”

“We can look after ourselves.”

“And what of the younger ones? I will not bring our family, Jinchūriki or otherwise into a nation that is actively seeking out those that are different and killing them. Out of all of you, Kabuto and Shizune are probably the only ones who would be safe.”

“But you shouldn’t have to do this alone.” Konan protested. “We are a family. You said that. You’ve said it so many times. And if Yagura-san has Sanbi then they are family too. Family protects and helps each other. You don’t have to save all of us on your own Kaa-chan.”

Uzu pressed a kiss to Konan’s hair.

“I never really saved you, you saved yourselves. I just gave you an opportunity to do so and a place to be safe and loved.”
“If you hadn’t saved us, one of us would probably be dead by now.” Konan whispered and clenched her fists tightly. “We were only children when our birth parents died and even though Jiraiya-sensei trained us we were still children when he left us. Growing up you gave us safety and warmth and love and the knowledge that we weren’t alone. And you aren’t alone either.”

Uzu chuckled. “When did you get so wise Raindrop?”

“She’s always been the smartest of us.” Yahiko’s voice pierced the night. He and Nagato had rolled over in their bedroll nearby and were looking at their mother and lover with fierce eyes.

“And she’s right Uzu-kaa-chan. You are not going to Kiri alone. Not to face a potentially mad Jinchūriki or Bijuu.” Nagato said softly but vehemently.

His words were echoed with similar from all her children who had awoken during Konan’s argument. They outnumbered Uzu thirteen to one. She wasn’t going to win. There would be no way they would let her go on her own.

“Even if you try and sneak off, it’s not like we don’t know we’re you intend to go. We’ll just follow you.” Konan announced and received further noises of agreement from the rest.

“I can see. You are all set on doing this?” Uzu looked around at all their faces. The nodded some resolutely, some mulishly and some with blatant rolling eyes (Kisame and Yugito had perfected the eyeroll to convey great sarcasm).

“Very well. But, we are going to be careful and plan.”

“You mean you’ve never had a plan before? When you were searching for the Bijuu?” Han asked. There was a tone of concern in his voice that no one could miss.

“Of course she didn’t plan.” Tsunade scoffed. “Have you not met Uzu-sama? She literally hates planning – she’s made of nature. Nature doesn’t plan it just does. It’s why she hates paperwork so much…”

Shizune snorted loudly at her mentor. “But you don’t have that excuse Tsunade-sama. You are human so why am I always having to do your paperwork?”

Konan watched her older sister and aunt descend into squabbles. She glanced over at her boys who were still snuggled up together and felt the urge to join them. When she had scooted her way in between them she reached up to give them both a thankful and grateful kiss.

They always had her back.

*  

It was whilst they were crossing the sea that Konan truly feared her mother for the first time. Feared her being lost to them. Feared for her and her overwhelming power and the consequences of that power when unleashed in encompassing grief.

They had hired a ship from the port town in Tea. They had gone there so Konan could speak to one of her informants (a civilian who could not use chakra and thus only send messages via live birds). The merchant informant had given them more details on the situation in Kiri and it had made them all uneasy. The Bloody Mist was apparently even bloodier.

An entire class of genin had been slaughtered by one of their own. The genin exam for Mist was brutal – fighting until only the strongest remained but never before had their been rumours of an
entire generation being culled by one.

Add to that the kekkai genkai cullings which were spreading across the islands of Kiri and the death toll was rising quickly.

Konan had hired a ship from her informant and the merchant had gathered up volunteers from his crews (he would not force anyone to go unwillingly into Kiri in its current state).

*  

A week or so into their voyage, late at night the sea had suddenly roiled and a tempest had seemingly sprung up out of nowhere.

Konan was sleeping as usual with her boys when she was startled awake by a sheer outpour of Uzu’s energy. Golden nature energy slammed into her body driving her out of sleep and sending her and her family stumbling to their feet.

Out on deck she scrambled, using chakra to keep her feet on the wooden boards and clinging to the sides of the vessel with her hands. The wind was howling, tearing at her hair, clothes and body so ferociously that she feared she would be snapped away – just like one of her origami creations. The rain driving into them was relentless, ice cold and filled with salt. She could taste it as it fell into her mouth.

“This is no ordinary rain!” Kisame roared to them all. The younger teens had been remained below with Utakata and Kimimaro keeping them in their room, but the Ame Trio and their aunt and uncles had made it on deck with Kisame. Konan was glad they weren’t there to witness Uzu standing at the prow of the ship, illuminated through the rain and screaming into the sky and ocean before them.

The crew fled from her and were huddled at the stern and the wheel, not one of them daring to go near the unearthly woman.

“Uzu-sama!” Rōshi bellowed. “You need to stop!”

His words did not penetrate the howling wind. They fought their way forwards towards Uzu.

She was truly glorious and terrifying garbed in her junihitoe with her hair unravelled and wildly snarling into the air.

Konan and her boys had to stop before they could reach Uzu. The driving wind and rain was too much for them. They huddled together and watched as Tsunade sank down next to them, she too had been defeated by the elements.

Lightning cracked through the sky in primal screeches, forks of it ripping the clouds asunder and illuminating their worried faces in pale light.

Rōshi and Han pushed forward, Kisame at their back. Konan watched, panting with fear and fatigue as her brother, her brave, kind brother managed to carry on past the Jinchūriki who had almost reached Uzu.

Kisame bent down and wrapped his arms around Uzu’s waist, pulling her back from the edge of the ship and into his embrace. He folded down around her, encircling her with his torso and uncaring of the wind and hair lashing at him. The wind was so fierce and wild that it actually cut him. Konan saw droplets of blood whipped away into the air from a cut on his cheek.
Kisame turned Uzu in his grasp, pressing her head into his chest and Konan could hear the whispers of her mother on the wind.


The tempest died as suddenly as it had come. The ocean and sky fell still, and the air was heavy with salt and whispers.

Konan wept as her Kaa-chan wailed noiselessly into Kisame’s chest.

*  

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kisame Part Six:
The aftermath of Kushina's death and Uzu's grief is affecting all the family. Kisame can't channel his frustration and anger healthily. He leads them into Kirigakure. Uzu rallies once more to save two of her children.
Kisame - Part Six

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of Kushina's death and Uzu's grief is affecting all the family. Kisame can't channel his frustration and anger healthily. He leads them into Kirigakure. Uzu rallies once more to save two of her children.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kisame

(Part Six)

Kisame did not like feeling helpless. He never had. He was practical. He could work things out, although he wasn’t a genius like Kabuto or the Uchiha brats, but he was clever.

Uzu’s grief and sadness wasn’t something he could fight though and feeling her crying into his chest and being unable, incapable of fixing her loss, made him feel helpless which in turn made him feel angry.

Anger was a feeling he had been used to as a child. Then he met Uzu and she took that anger away, gave him reasons to be happy, to be content, to feel loved. Uzu was his mother, even if he never referred to her as such. He adored her and cherished everything she had ever given him. He knew he would never leave her side (not willingly) and he saw her as a guiding light, steering him away from darkness and lies and dirt and rot and death.

Now his light, his mother, was dimmed and Kisame didn’t know what to do.

With all this anger and frustration and helplessness roiling around inside him, his temper and patience were short. After shouting at Jūgo and making the poor boy flinch, Kisame had felt guilty. Jūgo had only wanted to share his bread with Kisame but he had lost his temper when the boy wouldn’t take his refusal. Kisame wasn’t hungry but instead of just saying that he had ignored Jūgo until the boy took his hand and forced the bread into it.

Throwing the bread across the galley and then shouting at Jūgo to leave him alone had definitely not been one of Kisame’s finest moments.

The disapproving looks from Tsunade, Rōshi, Han, Kimimaro, Utakata and Kabuto had been bad enough. The disappointed look from Shizune had made him wince and the bewildered eyes and
quivering lip from Jūgo had made him bite through his lip.

Leaving the galley and storming up onto deck had seemed the best solution. He had punched the mast a couple of times (holding back his strength) before turning and leaning over the side to bellow wordlessly across the ocean.

He yelled until his breath ran out and then slumped down into a crouch, his hands still gripping the wood and his head thunking onto the side.

“I don’t suppose that helped. Shouting doesn’t do much and the mast is not a worthy opponent.” Tsunade said dryly. “Come.”

Kisame twisted and saw her standing in a ready stance, her hand beckoning him to fight. He surged into movement and drove his fist at her. She took his hit with her hand as if it were nothing. Over and over he punched at her and she either took his blow against her hand or blocked it and flicked his forehead with her free hand.

Strangely her teasing manner wasn’t infuriating him further but with each flick on his head he felt his frustration and anger ebbing away until it was just a low simmer.

Eventually he stopped and stood, feet apart and relaxed as much as possible.

“You look better now.” Tsunade commented. “If I wasn’t abstaining from alcohol, I’d offer you a drink. Sadly, the best I can do is tell you to buckle up. Things will probably get worse before they get better. At least that’s what my experience has told me.”

Kisame laughed weakly and stretched.

“Keh, I thought we’d had it easy for a while. Trouble was inevitable.”

“Hmm. Especially as Konohagakure seems to be causing trouble or at the centre of trouble more and more frequently.” Tsunade leant against the mast and stared up at the prow of the ship where Uzu and Yugito were snuggled under a mound of blankets.

“Uzu really doesn’t like your old village.” Kisame watched Tsunade out of the corner of his eye. “I don’t think she hates it, I don’t even know if she can feel hate, but I think she doesn’t like it very much.”

“I wouldn’t blame her. Not if what the Ame Trio have said is true. There has been so much senseless death in and because of Konoha. The White Fang, the children Orochimaru experimented on, all those killed in and because of a war Konoha might have started and now the Fourth and Kushina.”

Kisame patted Tsunade roughly on the shoulder. They exchanged no further words, they didn’t need to. Sometimes physical contact and sparring was enough for them. Their tempers flared quickly and burned out almost as swiftly as they came. But Kisame knew, if pushed, his anger would linger and fester, just as Tsunade’s resentment and grief had for all those years.

He left Tsunade to stare out across the open sea towards the growing lumps in the distance that signalled their approach to Kiri. Uzu was asleep with Yugito curled up against her and the young girl, Kisame’s first sister watched him warily.

“Have you been causing trouble fish boy?” She teased softly.

“Keh. I’m gonna have to apologise to Jūgo. Lost my temper.”
She rolled her eyes and lifted the mound of blankets so he could sidle in next to her. His arm went behind her body and Uzu’s, pulling both females closer to him. Yugito purred and nestled into his chest and Uzu murmured faintly but settled down when Kisame’s hand carded its way through her hair and massaged the back of her scalp and neck in soothing circles.

“We’re gonna have to keep an eye on her, Kitten.” Kisame murmured. “She’s more fragile than we’ve ever known.”

“Hmm. Matatabi says that Uzu-nee might lose too much one day. That her human body isn’t designed to take the power she wields. If Uzu-nee was pushed too far, lost too much, that power might tear her apart and Uzushio itself.”

A shiver ran up Kisame’s spine. It was a sombre thought.

“Well, we’ll just make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Yugito nuzzled into Kisame’s chest and made a noise of agreement. He felt moved and bent down to press a rare kiss to her head. The small purr of happiness she made chased away the last of his anger and frustration. Kisame was left with resolve and clearness of thought once more.

* *

Infiltrating Kiri was child’s play. Nothing about the nation had changed and with them stowed away in the cargo hold, hidden in large crates that supposedly contained vegetables and rice to be sold to Kiri citizens and seals masking their chakra and presence from the shinobi who inspected the ship’s hold, they made their way past the naval checkpoints and towards the main island with no trouble at all.

Once near Kirigakure the ship docked and they waited until nightfall to sneak off the ship, leaving the crew and the merchants to sell their wares. If Uzu’s family did not reappear within five days then the ship would leave as planned and they would have to find their own way off Kiri.

Kisame simultaneously hoped and didn’t hope that they ran into complications. Beating up some of his once comrades (particularly those who had attempted to force Utakata and Saiken to become weapons of war) would have been great fun. But he was an adult now with younger siblings depending on him. And causing trouble in Kiri meant causing trouble for Uzu which was something he wouldn’t do.

Getting into Kirigakure was a bit trickier. Luckily Kisame’s time as a specialist and working for Fuguki had included missions requiring exiting and entering Kirigakure through secret tunnels and passages that only a few knew of.

Kisame knew which were most frequently used and which were less well known. He led them through a sewage tunnel – one that led out to the ocean – and he could hear some of them holding back squeals as rats and other creatures scurried around and swam past them.

The sewage tunnel led to several large chambers where plants grew and Kisame knew these chambers would be a good place to set up a base camp. They needed somewhere they could return to and rest after ascending and doing some information retrieval in the village above.

What he didn’t know or expect however was for the chambers to be already occupied.

Standing with Samehada drawn and the Ame trio at his side with their own weapons or jutsu at the ready, Kisame was cursing their bad luck.
“Is that Kisame Hoshigaki?” His name rippled through the gathered shinobi (of which there were a surprising amount squeezed into the chamber), passing from genin, chunin and jōnin lips.

The crowd parted and a group postured in front of Uzu’s family. Kisame looked them over with a sneer.

“So, this is what you’ve been reduced to huh? Aō.”

Aō crossed his arms and stared intently at Kisame. “I see you’ve finally returned. A rogue nin who has apparently gone soft. Time was you wouldn’t have let anyone live, would’ve slaughtered entire squads. But rumour has it that you’ve been letting hunter nin go. And during the war when Kiri shinobi encountered you they came back with tales of injuries and Kishi Bojin but not a single death whilst in your presence. Lost your touch Kisame?”

Kisame lifted Samehada off his shoulder and the blade snarled and snapped at Aō. The group around the leader retreated, save for two brats that Kisame eyed warily.

“I’m more than happy to show you I haven’t lost my killing touch.” Kisame drawled. “But I wouldn’t want to upset Kishi Bojin.”

The nickname Uzu had been given suddenly echoed around the room as the whispering voices of the crowd passed it back.

Behind him, Kisame could hear the younglings snickering and giggling and Uzu’s long-suffering, drawn out and heavily sarcastic sigh.

“Kishi Bojin… And Utakata the Jinchūriki of the Six Tails. What pleasant gifts you’ve brought us.” Aō said.

“You touch them, and I will end you.” Kisame’s voice lost all sense of humour. It was dark and cold and thick with promise of pain and death.

Aō flinched as did the girl at his side but the boy swaggered forward to leer at Kisame, grinning with his own sharp teeth.

“So are shark teeth a real thing in Kiri?” Yugito not so subtly whispered to Rōshi.

“And who’re you supposed to be kid?” Kisame eyed the boy. He was tall, almost lanky but Kisame could see the coiled muscles and honed skill in the way the boy moved. This was a killer. A boy not much older than Yugito.

“Zabuza. Zabuza Momichi."

“The one who killed his entire graduating class. Am I supposed to be impressed? By you and your little gang hiding down here.”

Zabuza shrugged and shoved his hands in his pockets.

“We’re going to overthrow the Mizukage.”

“Just like that?”

“There might be a bit more killing and blood involved but yes.”

“Coups don’t work out that easy.”
“They do if you have a Jinchūriki.”

“Utakata is not your weapon.” Uzu’s voice lashed out and Zabuza halted his subtle prowl towards Utakata.

“And who’re you?” Aō pulled on Zabuza’s shoulder, drawing the boy back suspicious of Uzu who had stepped forward.

“Uzu.”

“Never heard of you.”

“She’s the one they call Kishi Bojin.” Kisame grinned. “She also happens to be the leader of Uzushiogakure and the spirit of the nation. But no big deal.”

Aō blinked. Zabuza stared. The girl with them squeaked and flicked her hair out of her eyes.

“Do you want to overthrow the Mizukage or do you want to try and save him?” Uzu asked.

The group shuffled uneasily.

“Can he be saved?” Aō queried.

“Isn’t it worth trying? Or were you just going to kill him?” Uzu retorted.

“It would be impossible.”

“What is right, can never be impossible.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact:
Uzu’s last line is from the film Belle (2013), about Dido Belle who was the first person of colour to be painted in a portrait at the same eye level as a white person. It’s a great period film that tackles the issue of slavery and race and perception of people with colour.

I love the line because it’s true.

Fuguki (Fuguki Suikazan) – member of the Seven Swordsman of the Mist and wielder of Samehada before Kisame. Fuguki was leaking information to enemies and lying to Kisame who then killed him and took Samehada. A canon character killed off earlier by me because I wanted to.

Next Chapter - Nagato Part Two:
Nagato and the family are worried about Uzu. They are all watching Uzu whilst they work with the rebels and gain intelligence on the Mizukage. Nagato makes some friends(?) and gets a flattering proposition. His lovers are not so impressed.
Nagato - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Nagato and the family are worried about Uzu. They are all watching Uzu whilst they work with the rebels and gain intelligence on the Mizukage. Nagato makes some friends(?) and gets a flattering proposition. His lovers are not so impressed.

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment! If we get 9 more kudos before tomorrow (03/08/20) then you'll all get a double update!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nagato

(Part Two)

*

Although Nagato knew that Uzu-kaa-chan was a spirit/energy given human form, sometimes he forgot. He had been reminded on their voyage to Kiri when her powers set free caused a tempest but apart from that unique incident, he normally didn’t remember that she wasn’t human.

There was a magic about her though. How she could make friends or at least acquaintances wherever she went. How people would flock to listen to her play. How they would light up when she smiled at them, just like how he knew he and the other foundlings did when she smiled at them. With a few words she had settled the cautious rebellion lurking beneath Kiri and now they were happily including Uzu’s family in their plots.

If she had been anyone else, Nagato knew it would not have ended so peacefully and with no blood shed.

Skulking through Kirigakure, Nagato stayed close to Uzu. Kisame had assigned the Ame trio to be Uzu’s watch dogs. They weren’t just gathering intel on Yagura and the situation of the village but keeping an eye on Uzu-kaa-chan.

All of them had agreed, every single one of them including Rōshi, that Uzu-kaa-chan needed to be reminded of what she had, and it was their job to do that. They needed her. Needed her to stay in control and keep her powers contained because if she didn’t. Well. Nagato wasn’t worried about what she might do to them, but rather, what her powers could do to her. She had more power in her than anyone Nagato had ever met. He personally thought a human body couldn’t contain that much power. Not without serious consequences.

*
It took them weeks to gather enough intelligence on Yagura to even begin planning how to stop him and the shinobi eagerly following his orders.

Nagato knew that Yagura’s character change was abrupt, sudden, unexpected. There had been no hint of insanity or madness. It was as if he had suddenly woken up one day and snapped. Whilst stress, trauma and depression had caused shinobi to have a break with reality (Nagato had heard of horror stories of shinobi killing comrades because they had lost their minds after experiencing too much death) they usually showed symptoms beforehand.

This was too sudden, too perfect and too tidy. Aside from his sudden desire to kill of kekkai genkai clans and users and being cold and vicious, Yagura seemed like a normal (as far as Jinchūriki and shinobi went) man. He ate, slept, worked and went about his day as if he wasn’t regularly ordering mass slaughter or encouraging genocide.

But there was lack of emotion. Nagato had watched. His Rinnegan noticing everything. Yagura had no emotion. He didn’t laugh, smile, cry, shout, rage, bluster, snicker, snarl. Everything he said was delivered in a cold, calm voice. Monotone, without any inflection. There was no emotional response to anything.

A civilian woman had screamed at him in the street and called him a murdering bastard and a beast. Yagura had just stood there and watched, the woman’s spit landing on his face and there had been no emotion. No rage, no humiliation, no regret.

Nagato sought out Zabuza and Mei to ask if Yagura had always been unfeeling. It just seemed to perfect a lack of response. No one, not the greatest shinobi or deceiver in the world could remove all emotion. It was inherent, an automatic human attribute that couldn’t be completely suppressed.

“He used to smile.” Mei said weakly. “When I got things right when we were training. He’d smile and pat me on the head. He used to shout at me when I called him chibi-sensei. But he was always smiling.”

Zabuza had his arms crossed across his chest. “I remember him screaming at a shinobi who had kicked a merchant out of the way. He had reprimanded the jōnin, and then apologised to the merchant and helped them pick up their wares. He joked and laughed with them. The merchant accepted his apology and agreed not to ask for recompense from Kiri for the slight.”

“Yagura was kind. He blustered and pretended he was hard and tough but underneath it all he was actually really kind and cried easily.” Mei added.

Nagato offered a weak smile to the young girl who looked close to tears. “I thought he probably was. Otherwise I doubt you would be so loyal Mei-chan.”

Mei sniffled and rubbed at her eyes. Zabuza shifted uncomfortably and stared intently at Nagato. The intensity of the boy’s stare made him wriggle nervously.

“I’m going to speak with Uzu-kaa-san. But I agree with you both. Yagura is not himself and I don’t think he’s the one pulling the strings in Kiri anymore.”

“What do you think happened? Is he being coerced?” Zabuza growled.

“I have my suspicions, but I need to check with Uzu-kaa-san. She’s the best authority on what could ail a Jinchūriki to this extent.”

“You make it sound like a sickness.” Mei accused.
“He’s not sick.” Zabuza retorted. “No sickness makes you decide to commit genocide.”

“Actually Tsunade-sama has already considered mental issues or sicknesses that could cause such changes in personality. They do exist and can affect a person greatly.” Nagato replied but winced when Zabuza sneered. “Anyway, I must be going. Thank you for the information.”

He stood and bowed to both of them. When he left their little alcove, Zabuza fell into step next to him. Nagato resisted the urge to wince. Despite his younger years, Zabuza was tall and intimidating. He oozed viciousness and strength, like a predatory animal. Nagato wasn’t too concerned that Zabuza intended him harm but he was finding the younger man’s attention disconcerting.

“Can I help you Zabuza-kun?” Nagato inquired.

“Are you taken?”

“Taken?” Nagato frowned. “Taken where?”

Zabuza grinned, flashing his sharp teeth eagerly. “Taken as in fucking. You seem like you might be fun. All that pretty pale skin and that red hair. And the way you’re so polite and nice. Makes me wanna mess you up a bit.”

Nagato felt heat spread across his cheeks and he glanced around. Zabuza’s words had not gone unnoticed and several Kiri shinobi were leering at them as they passed.

“I am. Whilst I’m – flattered – I’m not interested thank you Zabuza-san.”

“Maybe I can steal you away?” Zabuza ran his tongue over the sharp points of his upper teeth. It would’ve been seductive if Nagato didn’t adore his lovers.

“No, you can’t.” Yahiko’s voice snapped out into the air. His arm wrapped around Nagato’s shoulders possessively and Nagato sank into the hold happily. Konan pressed in next to him, the pair of them pushing Zabuza away with their presence.

Zabuza’s eyes widened slightly in surprise before he chuckled.

“Oh, I can see now. Well, if you ever change your mind Nagato, I wouldn’t mind messing you up. But these two probably do a good job of it.”

The boy slunk back to Mei and the Ame trio watched him go.

“That kid has serious balls.” Yahiko said dryly. “Its rather frightening. Can you imagine how intense he’ll be in a few years?”

“Indeed.” Konan chuckled. “But he’ll have to find someone else to mess up. Nagato is ours aren’t you darling?”

Nagato squirmed but kissed both Yahiko and Konan on the cheek in response.

“I need to speak to Ka-chan. I think I know what made Yagura change.”

* 

“Could it? Could it be the Sharingan?” Nagato whispered.

The whole of Uzu’s family had gathered in their sealed camp area. They could see the Kiri shinobi
watching them curiously from beyond the barrier but as usual Uzu’s seals were formidable and prevented anyone from seeing or hearing clearly.

“It could be. A long term genjutsu?” Tsunade hummed. Uzu was staring at the ground, her brow creased as she thought.

“But I thought Jinchūriki were harder to put under genjutsu? We have a natural defence to genjutsu. Our Bijuu can disrupt our chakra flow and break it easily.” Han pointed out.

“You’re right! Damn. I thought that might be the answer we’ve been looking for.” Tsunade ground her teeth.

“Unless the Bijuu has been placed under a genjutsu too and then the Jinchūriki is placed under a different one.” Uzu announced.

They all fell silent.

“Can – can someone do that?” Yugito stuttered. Utakata bumped his arm against hers and she nestled against him.

“The Sharingan probably could.”

“So, did Konoha do this?” Nagato asked.

They all looked uncomfortable at the idea of the Uchiha being ordered and willingly doing something like this. They knew Itachi and Shisui wouldn’t but they were only two in a large and powerful clan.

“I don’t know. But I do not think Sarutobi would do such a thing. And Minato wouldn’t. Probably. Kushina-chan was his wife and a Jinchūriki so he might have known or suspected that you need to incapacitate the Bijuu first, but I don’t think Konoha would. Not when they’ve just finished fighting and only just winning a war.”

“But there are other factions in Konoha who are not so eager for peace.” Yahiko warned. “That shady group who tricked us in Ame.”

“I know.” Uzu sighed. “But for now, let us assume that Yagura and Isobu are under a genjutsu. If we can break it then hopefully Yagura will be returned to normal.”

“And how are we going to break a genjutsu on the Mizukage, one of the strongest shinobi in Kiri and a Jinchūriki to boot? We know he can still access and use Isobu’s powers even if he’s under a genjutsu. Mei said that he’s been seen in Tailed Beast Mode once since the change.” Shizune pointed out.

“How do you break a genjutsu? Even a Sharingan inflicted one?” Uzu said bitterly.

“Disrupting the chakra flow.” Kimimaro said.

“Or physical pain.” Kabuto retorted. “But I imagine that Jinchūriki have a greater tolerance to pain. I know that Yugito-nee and Utakata-kun can take blows that would cripple a non-Jinchūriki.”

“Those are our two options?” Rōshi winced. “They’re kinda shit.”

“Agreed.” Rumbled Han.

“We need to get close enough to use our own chakra to disrupt the flow or pound him so much that
we break the genjutsu. Will that work on both Isobu and Yagura though?” Kisame mused. For once he didn’t seem eager for a fight.

“We need to disrupt both of them. Not one but both. And Isobu should be our first target. If he regains his consciousness, he can withhold his chakra from Yagura. Yagura would still be able to use Tailed Beast Mode but we must assume that with Isobu subjugated he could potentially go into Bijuu Mode. If Isobu has free will, Bijuu Mode will be out of reach. That will put us in a much better position.” Uzu said.

“I don’t really fancy having a Bijuu Battle Royale.” Utakata sighed. “If Yagura can achieve Bijuu Mode and we are forced to engage in a similar state or with our Bijuu as almost full manifestation working alongside us, we could cause serious injury and harm to our allies and civilians. Let alone the devastation Bijuu can inflict just by physical fights on the land and village.”

“So, we need to drive Yagura away from the village. Preferably not near water. Oh, wait. We’re surrounded by water.” Yahiko sarcastically drawled.

Konan slapped his arm and scowled. He grinned and rubbed his nose.

“This isn’t going to be easy.” Nagato sighed.

“No. But it is the right thing to do.” Uzu replied.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Utakata Part Five:
Utakata isn't particularly thrilled that he's back in Kiri. But he wants to help. Zabuza is a flirt, Mei has a burgeoning crush and Saiken shows up to complicate matters. Utakata seeks comfort from Kimimaro, who is almost entirely unsympathetic.
Utakata - Part Five

Chapter Summary

Utakata isn't particularly thrilled that he's back in Kiri. But he wants to help. Zabuza is a flirt, Mei has a burgeoning crush and Saiken shows up to complicate matters. Utakata seeks comfort from Kimimaro, who is almost entirely unsympathetic.

Chapter Notes

Double update because you gave me not just the 9 kudos to reach 450 but 13 in less than 24 hours! Thanks as always for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

Mei is a little different to how she is portrayed in canon when we see her as an adult. My headcanon is that she grew into her open appreciation for beautiful men but at her current age (15) she's still a bit shy and not as forthright/open about her sexuality and desires.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Utakata

(Part Five)

*

Being back in Kiri was terrifying and made him feel permanently queasy, nauseous, bilious, panicked and at the brink of fleeing at all times.

But, he was here because Uzu-kaa-chan was here. His family was here. And a potential new family member needed them. So Utakata wouldn’t flee. He would stay and he would do his best to protect his family and help the nation that had caused his such anguish and loneliness and confusion, because maybe Uzu-kaa-chan was right – humans were silly and foolish, but Utakata didn’t really want them to die for it.

Their plan was starting to come together. They had decided to split the family apart. The Jinchūriki and Uzu would deal with Yagura and hopefully, free him of the genjutsu they believed him to be under. The non-Jinchūriki would remain in Kirigakure, fighting alongside their allies and in Shizune and Kabuto’s case, working in medical posts that they were setting up in safe houses dotted around the village.

Now, they were all preparing for the upcoming fight. Uzu was making seal after seal; restraining, freezing, calming and barrier seals amongst other more specialised ones. Utakata had been helping until only a few minutes ago when he began to tire and make mistakes.

“Go and get some rest Utakata-kun. You and Saiken are going to be vital tomorrow.” Uzu said and
brushed her ink-stained hand over his cheek.

He stood and leaned down to kiss her on the cheek.

“You need to rest too Uzu-kaa-chan. Remember you have a mortal body.” He gently reminded her.

“I will. I just want to make a few protective barrier seals for the medical posts. They should be protected against incursions and potential building destruction.”

Utakata winced. “I do hope Kabuto-kun and Shizune-nee don’t get a building dropped on them.”

“When fighting in a settlement with ninjutsu that is a high possibility.” Uzu’s voice was monotone.

“Most of the destruction of Uzushiogakure was from attacks directed at a person but ninjutsu don’t account for buildings too.”

Utakata shuddered. He remembered what his home had been like before the civilians and Uzushioeans returned. He remembered playing in the rubble and running through ruined streets that had been reclaimed by grasses, flowers and vines. There had been wide spread destruction and then pockets of weathered buildings that had survived the invasion.

“Hopefully that won’t happen here.” He said softly.

Uzu smiled up at him, the shadows in her eyes retreating for now. Utakata could still sense his mother’s grief at Kushina’s death and Kurama’s subsequent resealing. His powers as a sensor were growing now, they had ever since Saiken and he had become friends and the Bijuu was given more freedom from his altered seal. Utakata wondered if he had always had the potential to become a formidable sensor type shinobi or if Saiken’s ability to sense emotions (which all the Bijuu possessed apparently) had augmented his own skill.

“Go, rest. Talk to Saiken. Try not to worry.” Uzu urged him.

He left and wandered back through the labyrinth of underground caves and tunnels back towards the cavern they had claimed as theirs on their arrival in the rebellion. He rolled his head on his neck and stretched his arms, feeling the tightness from leaning over a table for hours easing with each stretch and movement.

“Heading back?” Zabuza fell into step alongside him and Utakata glanced at him and Mei who seemed to almost permanently accompany him.

“Yes. I’ve done as many seals as I can. Uzu-kaa-chan is finishing up too.”

“Hmm. She’s not your mother really, is she?” Mei asked innocently, her hair hiding her eyes but Utakata could see her nibbling her lower lip. If she would stand up straighter and stop hiding behind her hair, Utakata thought Mei would be quite a pretty girl. A potential beauty when she was fully grown. Instead she seemed to lack confidence in herself unless it came to her skills as a kunoichi and her ninjutsu.

“Not my birth mother no. But she has raised me since I was eight and left Kiri. I have more memories of her than my birth mother.” Utakata replied.


Utakata laughed loudly and shook his head with a wicked smile.

“No, not at all. Well, she is immensely powerful but she’s kind. And gentle most of the time. She
could be a demon but she chooses not to. And she doesn’t steal children. All of us, the ones who call her Kaa-chan are adopted, rescued, found, saved by Uzu. And the ones that we found during the war, orphans of villages destroyed by the nations conflict, well they were found and taken to Uzushio to be safe.”

Zabuza sighed, disappointedly crossing his arms.

“I thought she seemed too nice.”

“I like her. She’s strong but in a different way to Tsunade-sama.” Mei blushed and glanced at Utakata.

“Tsunade-oba-chan is fierce and strong and so is Uzu-kaa-chan. You’re right. You could be like them both one day too Mei. I think you have the potential to be a stunning, powerful, strong kunoichi.” Utakata said. He wasn’t Uzu-kaa-chan who could inspire and make you believe you were and could be more than you are, but he would try to give Mei a confidence boost. It seemed the girl needed one, especially as she was the same age as him yet appeared around Zabuza’s age.

“Damn, you Uzushio shinobi are all too nice.” Zabuza scoffed before running his tongue along his sharp teeth and leaning in to peer at Utakata’s face. “But it does make me wanna mess you all up a bit. In more ways than one.”

Utakata raised an eyebrow. “I’ve already heard about your seduction or lack of seduction of Nagato. I’m not interested either.”

“Bet we could have fun.” Zabuza rumbled. Beside him Mei made a squeak but peered eagerly from behind her fringe.

There was surge of energy and Saiken materialised between Zabuza and Utakata, pushing the Demon of the Mist away.

“Leave Uta-kun alone!” Saiken burbled “You’re not gentle enough for him. Mei-chan on the other hand.”

Utakata hissed at Saiken and grabbed one of his tails. Saiken giggled and waggled his eyestalks at Mei.

“So, you only go for girls huh? I can live with that.” Zabuza crossed his arms but there was slight pout to his lips.

“Oh no, Uta-kun likes boys and girls. But you just aren’t his type. He likes the hard but gentle type. What was it you said again Uta-kun? The ones who can kill but then turn around and smile like they’re picking flowers?”

Utakata gave up trying to tug Saiken away and groaned. He stomped off hastily towards their cavern and his sleeping roll which was beckoning to him.

He could hear Saiken introducing himself to Zabuza and Mei, the two Kiri nin both eager to meet a Bijuu for the first time. They were following along in Utakata’s embarrassed wake.

*

When he finally reached the cavern Utakata found most of his family assembled around their cooking fire and Kisame ladling out bowls of rice topped with vegetables and grilled fish. Utakata flung himself down dramatically next to Kimimaro, burying his face in the younger teen’s shoulder.
and silvery hair that was draped loosely over his back and shoulders.

“Long day?” Kimimaro said with amusement.

“Wait, why are there two more brats?” Kisame scowled and glared at Zabuza who grinned toothily and Mei who squeaked and hid behind Saiken.

“Ah, Zabuza-kun and Mei-chan. Are you joining us for dinner?” Uzu appeared from the cavern entrance and smiled welcomingly at the Kiri shinobi.

“No!” Kisame bellowed and leapt over Jūgo and Yugito who were grinning eagerly.

Uzu blinked and turned to face Kisame, the blue-skinned man looming over her with a wild look in his eye.

“Why can’t Zabuza-kun and Mei-chan join us? Did you not make enough food?”

“You don’t need any more brats. I know you. You offering them food is the prelude to inviting them to join us. They have parents and family. They’re fine. They don’t need you adopting them. You have enough brats already. If you need one to coddle go look after Jūgo, or Kabuto, or Yugito, or Kimimaro!”

Kisame was almost frantic as he pointed to Uzu’s children who were fighting back laughter and scowling at Kisame.

“I don’t need coddling.” Kabuto announced imperiously. “I am perfectly capable of looking after myself.”

Tsunade and Shizune both nodded seriously when their student looked at them for confirmation. The second the youngest of Uzu’s kids was looking away they both grinned at each other, knowing that Kabuto adored Uzu’s attention and being coddled by her when she was on Uzushio.

Zabuza strode past Uzu and Kisame, tugging Mei along with him, flopping down with his ungainly long limbs akimbo next to Utakata. He resumed his lavicious looks and Utakata groaned loudly.

“I’m not interested.” He whined.

Across the fire Yahiko, Konan and Nagato all stared hard at Zabuza. He didn’t even flinch at their hard gazes.

Kimimaro patted Utakata’s back and the teen nuzzled into his younger brother’s silver hair whimpering.

“There, there Utakata. What’s wrong, tell me all about it?”

“Zabuza wants to sleep with me, Saiken said that I like boys and girls and that I like the hard but gentle type. I don’t even have a type per say. I just like people. Some more than others. But Zabuza-kun won’t get the message!”

Kimimaro lifted his head and stared at Zabuza. He was smiling. A perfectly normal smile. Innocent and friendly.

“Stop trying to get into my nii’chan’s pants. Both of them. Or I will castrate you and you’ll never sleep with anyone. And wouldn’t that be a shame Zabuza-chan? You’d miss out on so much.”

On Kimimaro’s other side Jūgo cracked his knuckles in addition to the ethereal-like teen’s threat.
The whole time both of them were smiling sweetly, Kimimaro more so.

Zabuza glanced around the fire and saw that nearly all the teenagers were demonstrating similar threats, twirling kunai and senbon in their fingers, sharpening swords, cracking knuckles or playing with jutsu.

He swallowed. For the first time, in a long time, he felt nervous. He was used to being the most intimidating one in the room. People had been flinching back from him and his presence and his reputation almost as long as he could remember. It had been many years since he was not the scariest being in the room.

“Do we have an understanding Zabuza-chan?” Kimimaro asked.

Zabuza nodded.

Mei stared at Kimimaro with wide eyes, brushing her coppery fringe out of her eyes.

“Are you an angel? I’ve never seen anyone shut Zabuza up so well.”

Kimimaro laughed and handed her a bowl of food. Mei noticed Jūgo pout and shift himself closer to Kimimaro.

“No, I’m just a protective brother. Utakata-kun and I are the same age. And he’s nicer than I am. Whereas I’m – vicious when the need arises, Utakata is not mean unless absolutely necessary.”

Mei licked her lips, and not at the food, taking in every detail of Kimimaro and Utakata. From their thin but lithe forms, their contrasting hair, their close brotherly touches as they leaned in and around each other to talk to their family.

Then she remembered how Kimimaro had warned Zabuza off Utakata. And she saw Jūgo watching her with knowing eyes. She froze mid-bite when Jūgo shook his head at her once.

She knew what that meant. Utakata and Kimimaro were off-limits.

Uzu’s family was off-limits to Kiri shinobi. But they were damn fine to look at.

Mei resolved to find a way to pin her hair out of her face. She didn’t want to miss a second appreciating the fine male forms. It would be sacrilegious.

Behind them Uzu and Kisame finally ceased arguing, Kisame managing to get the final word in.

“No nicknames!”

*

Chapter End Notes

Yahiko - Part Two will be posted ASAP.
Starting a coup was surprisingly easy. Especially when the shinobi on your side were determined to save their Mizukage and Village. The fighting that broke out was suspiciously in favour of their side and Yahiko wondered exactly how many people had kekkai genkai or knew those who did. Whilst kekkai genkai users made up roughly one in ten shinobi, that was still a high number. And they were usually powerful shinobi or at least valuable because of their bloodline which they could pass on.

Killing off kekkai genkai users would only weaken Kiri and further their reputation as the Bloody Mist.

Their current fighting companion was an example of this. Zabuza Momichi, the newest of the Seven Swordsman, reviled throughout Kirigakure because of his still fairly recent slaughter of his entire graduating year.

Yahiko was glad that Uzu-kaa-chan hadn’t enacted any such test on Uzushio for qualifying as genin. That was probably down to the reduced numbers of pre-genin on the island and the fact that they had no formal shinobi academy as of yet.

Instead, chunin and jōnin who were on the island rotated in and taught small groups, educating them in basics. Those with kekkai genkai or clan abilities were given additional training independently whilst those without special abilities trained with more shinobi to find their skills and hone new ones. It was working so far, and the chunin and jōnin who taught them had made a test theoretical and practical to decide who should graduate. So far, they had five new genin and they were all divided up and put into mixed groups of jōnin and chunin – following the Konoha standard of three genin and one jōnin wasn’t how Uzu worked.

Konan had found out how many genin died during the Second and Third Shinobi Wars – if their jōnin-sensei was removed from the equation very few genin survived. It didn’t make sense when they had so few to clump three of them together with only one elite.

But Yahiko knew none of their genin were on a par with Zabuza. He was a demon – just like them – on the battlefield. But unlike them, he held no compunctions about killing.

Yahiko caught Konan’s eye and she nodded. All of their family carried one of Konan’s paper butterflies on them and she was using them to monitor where everyone was. The plan was for the
Kiri shinobi to draw Yagura out and then the Jinchūriki and Uzu would take the Mizukage out of
the village and into the misty forests.

Those not blessed with a Bijuu were to remain in the village and help their new allies regain
control from the warmongers, sycophants and all-round unpleasant shinobi who had endorsed and
enjoyed enacting Yagura’s slaughter.

This plan made Yahiko, his lovers, Tsunade, Shizune, Kimimaro, Jūgo and Kabuto uncomfortable.
They did not like being separated from Uzu and their siblings. But it was necessary. Whilst they
had strength and skills that surpassed your average shinobi they were not on a level where they
could stand against chakra constructs that could obliterate landscapes nor a woman who could rival
a god in terms of sheer power.

“Getting slow there Yahiko.” Nagato huffed as he sent a stream of water at a group that made to
attack them. The chunin were swept away from the Ame Trio and Zabuza.

“Just worried.” Yahiko mumbled.

“Well get unworried and focus on the situation here and now.” Konan scolded. “Uzu-kaa-san
won’t be happy if you get injured, either of you.”

“Aww Konan! Why do you make it sound like we always get injured?” Yahiko moaned and
whacked a shinobi on the head sending them crashing to the ground unconscious. Nagato slapped a
restraining seal on the man’s back and they continued further towards the administration building.

“Your track records. I have not been grievously injured in all the time since we met Uzu. And even
before that I think I have sustained the least injuries. Probably because I’m smarter than you both.”

Nagato and Yahiko protested but were cut off by Zabuza grunting at them.

“Not that I’m not enjoying your foreplay, but can we get on with it? I’m getting bored.”

The Ame Trio looked at the Demon of the Mist and shrugged in unison.

“Shall we?” Yahiko gestured to the oncoming shinobi and they all leapt into the fray.

*  

The fighting was fierce and fast. Yahiko, Konan and Nagato worked seamlessly and fluidly
together. Whenever one of them was knocked back, another took their place and the third defended
them. They were a precise unit, resolved in their desire to win.

Far from Kirigakure, back in the twisting towers of water carved stone and misty forests Yahiko
could hear and occasionally see great explosions. All those fighting in Kirigakure, rebellion and
loyalists alike, could feel and sense the titanic battle playing out away from the fragile village.

Whilst he had been frustrated that the non-Jinchūriki, the human components of their family were
being relegated to assisting the rebellion, Yahiko realised now that they wouldn’t have stood a
chance in the battle between Bijuu.

Zabuza had reunited with Mei and Ao and the three Kiri rebels were leading the final push into the
Kazekage tower where the last of the old guard, those bloodthirsty shinobi who had endorsed and
enacted Yagura’s slaughter were holed up.

“We’ll watch and wait. If they manage to escape the rebels, then we’ll apprehend them. But the
decisive action must come from Kiri shinobi.” Konan advised them and Yahiko and Nagato nodded in agreement.

This was not their fight to win. Yagura and Isobu were their primary motivation. What befell Kirigakure and their hierarchy after Yagura was either freed or killed was not their business. They would offer advice, but all future actions of Kiri shinobi must be freely decided without Uzu and by association Uzushiogakure’s influence.

“I don’t like waiting around.” Yahiko griped. He spun his sword in his hand, flicking off drops of blood.

“Agreed.” Nagato leaned into Konan. She was sat on a fallen wall and Nagato was cross-legged on the ground in front of her with his eyes closed, attempting to rest them without interference.

“That is where we are now. Kimimaro and Jūgo are currently transporting the wounded to the medic centre Shizune-nee and Kabuto-kun set up.” Konan said. She was the calm in the storm, her hand carding through Nagato’s locks as if they were back in their bedroom on Uzushio, unworried and unconcerned.

Yahiko groaned and rolled his shoulders.

“I almost wish something would happen.”

Mere seconds later, as if his words had summoned it, there was a large explosion a few streets away. The three of them surged to their feet and were darting across roofs and debris towards the source.

Skidding to a halt at the mouth of the street Yahiko blocked a blow from a thin, needle-like blade.

“It’s the Seven Swordsmen. The ones who didn’t join the rebels.” Yahiko called.

“And Tsunade-ba-chan.” Nagato pointed before sending a jutsu at the three swordsmen, pushing them back.

“Which blades are we up against?” Konan sent a flurry of paper at their attackers and they took the opportunity to circle around them to Tsunade’s side.

Their oba-chan was grinning wickedly, sweat and dirt stains on her skin. Her golden-brown eyes alight with battle.

“Are you alright Tsunade-oba-chan?” Nagato looked her over whilst Yahiko and Konan watched the swordsman regrouping.

“I’m fine kid. Kenjutsu and my abilities don’t really go hand in hand without support, however. Glad you arrived when you did. Evens the playing field a bit. There’ll be five against four once Kisame and that other one gets back.”

“Which one is Kisame fighting?” Konan asked.

“Kubutowari, hammer and axe. Masked guy wields Nuibari, can stitch his victims together with wire after impaling them. Then we’ve got another wielding Kiba, lightning blades and the last is wielding Kubikiribōchō. That’s all I’ve got for you. Don’t know details about the shinobi using them. But I remember fighting previous Swordsmen in the Second Shinobi War. The blades are nasty pieces of work. Don’t underestimate them.” Tsunade rattled off and they all took in their opponents.
“Wind against Lightning?” Yahiko suggested and the others nodded. He launched himself at the Kiba wielder and the two began a battle of blades with lightning and wind natures flaring trying to overcome the other.

“I’ve got the needle one.” Nagato opened his eyes, the Rinnegan seeing the blade arcing towards them. He pushed the blade away, sending it soaring back towards the masked shinobi. Nagato knew he had the advantage and used Deva Path to manipulate Nuibari and the shinobi. Soon his opponent was tangled in a web of his own wire.

Together Konan and Tsunade tag teamed Kubikiribōchō. The blade began to show cracks after taking only two of Tsunade’s chakra-enhanced punches. Konan’s origami shuriken slicing at the shinobi’s extremities and harassing him from all sides.

The shinobi cursed as Kubikiribōchō cracked further and shards of the blade dropped onto the street.

“We aren’t going to win this one.” He called to his fellow swordsmen.

“Agreed.” Growled the Kiba wielder. Nuibari’s wielder stopped struggling within his tangled web of wires and made a hand signal.

“Watch out!” Kisame bellowed and launched himself in front of Tsunade.

The Ame Trio scattered as a series of paper bombs which had been laid in the street around them, on the debris, on buildings and even on the very ground where they were standing illuminated.

The explosion tore at their cloaks, heat chasing them as they fled the wave of fire and shrapnel coursing towards them. Konan yelped as a shard of hot metal sliced into her cheek and cauterised the cut as it passed through her.

Nagato stopped and held his hand out. He shouted and Yahiko watched as his lover’s eyes strained, holding the repulsive push and sending the flames and detritus away from them. Once the wave of fire ceased Nagato began to sink to his knees, his chakra depleted and his eyes weeping blood.

Yahiko caught him beneath his knees, swinging his young lover into his arms. From a pocket in his cloak he pulled out Nagato’s blindfold and slipped it over his weeping eyes.

As soon as his sight was obscured Nagato sighed and relaxed.

“Are you alright Konan?”

Konan tilted her cheek and gently probed the red and black wound with her fingertips.

“I’ll live. It would’ve been worse if not for Nagato.”

“He has a habit of saving us at the last minute.” Yahiko said laughingly. Fear had filled him at the thought of losing both of them but now, with Nagato in his arms and Konan stroking Nagato’s cheeks, he felt euphoria for having survived such an explosion.

“We should check on Tsunade-ba-chan and Kisame-nii.” Konan glanced back down the still smouldering and flaming street.

The buildings were destroyed for at least a block. Smoke was curling into the air in bulging towers of black. Soot and ash speckled the air and embers were floating like macabre fireflies around them.
Konan led the way and Yahiko trusted her to warn him of any imminent danger.

“No.” She breathed.

He rushed to her side and tightened his arms reflexively around Nagato’s body, squeezing his frail frame.

Kisame was lying face up with Tsunade leaning over him. Both of them were stained with blood and illuminated by the green glowing chakra pouring from Tsunade’s hands.

“What’s happening?” Nagato asked worriedly. His hands lifted from his lap, to lift his blindfold.

“Kisame-nii must’ve blocked oba-chan from the explosion.” Yahiko explained softly. “His arm… his arm has been severed.”


Chapter End Notes

Umm.... have a cookie? Sorry not sorry?

Notes:
I have no idea about Naruto figures regarding kekkai genkai birth/users/bloodlines. I made it up.
The swords mentioned are all from the Seven Swordsmen of the Hidden Mist. The ones who defected to the rebels’ side were the two remaining swordsmen including Mangetsu, Suigetsu’s older brother. Remember there are only six Swordsmen loyal to Kiri in some way, Kisame killed his mentor and took Samehada.
Zabuza doesn’t wield Kubikiribōchō yet. He’s going to win it later off Jūzō.

Next Chapter - Yagura Part One:
In which we learn about Yagura and Isobu's relationship, how they came to be Jinchuriki and Bijuu and a little bit of Yagura's background. Yagura also gets a nickname...
Chapter Summary

In which we learn about Yagura and Isobu's relationship, how they came to be Jinchūriki and Bijuu and a little bit of Yagura's background. Yagura also gets a nickname...

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the bookmarks, subscriptions, kudos and comments!

Brief family tree for Yagura in Uzu-verse.
Yagura's mother and father are both "paper" ninja - chunin skilled in tactics/codebreaking/research etc.
Yagura's mother is the youngest of three siblings, her oldest brother was the former Mizukage and her middle sibling - her other brother - was the Jinchūriki before Yagura. Yagura's father is not from a prominent family but is skilled in chakra control.
Yagura is an only child and is approximately 21 years old (we never got an age in canon so I'm making him a year or so older than Kisame).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yagura

(Part One)

*

Isobu was a pretty relaxed guy, for a Bijuu anyway. Not that Yagura had much experience with Bijuu having only ever met Isobu but once Sanbi was sealed inside him as a last resort he had realised quickly that if he wanted to survive, he needed to make peace with the Bijuu.

It hadn’t been easy, but Yagura was determined. He was one of the strongest shinobi in Kiri. He was a potential candidate for Mizukage, in spite of his relatively young age. He wouldn’t give in to a beast of chakra but at the same time he didn’t want to be Sanbi’s enemy.

“What’s your name?” He asked the Sanbi when the beast had finally settled down enough to listen to Yagura. It had taken days. Days of roiling and writhing chakra pushing at him and battering his own defences and preventing him from resting fully.

“My name?” Sanbi grumbled in surprise. “What are you doing? This isn’t how the Jinchūriki usually operate. Aren’t you just going to take my chakra and demand I obey you?”

Yagura wrinkled his nose and sat crossed leg on an oversized clam shell that littered his mindscape. As far as prison’s went Sanbi’s was actually kind of nice, the coral pillars and chains wrapped around the Bijuu were almost pretty and the bed of clams was probably sort of soft if you
were a giant turtle.

“Maybe, but I don’t want to be like the rest. I want to change things. Kiri will take a while to change. But I can start a little closer to home as it were, with you. I don’t want to be your enemy Sanbi-san. I’d rather be your ally.”

Sanbi blinked, his one exposed eye closing and opening swiftly.

“Are you mad? Did you get dropped on the head as a child?”

Yagura chuckled.

“No. Not to my knowledge.”

“You do seem rather small for an adult squishy. Maybe your growth has been stunted.”

Yagura scowled. “I’m fully grown thank you very much! I come from a line of short people. It’s hereditary.”

“So, you say small squishy. But you amuse me. I am Isobu.”

Triumph welled within him and Yagura fought back the urge to do a fist pump in the air.

“Nice to meet you Isobu-san.”

“Small squishy with manners, could be worse. But I will see if you can uphold your earlier statements to be an ally.”

“I have a name too you know. Most ‘squishies’ do. I’m Yagura.”

“I suppose I can refer to you by your name. You are giving me the same courtesy.”

Yagura grinned and hopped off the clam shell. He trotted over to Isobu, the turtle looking simultaneously amused and concerned.

“This is going to be the best partnership, you’ll see Isobu-san.”

*

The war had finally ended and Yagura was implementing changes within Kirigakure. He was going to change his village, make it better, help remove the tainted name it had gained after decades of needless death and slaughter.

He was going to change The Bloody Mist to just Mist. His people deserved to know what peace was, or at least a peace that they could experience within the village. The rest of the shinobi world could remain bloody but here, in Kirigakure, his home, his village, his people would be able to rest and find peace.

He had wanted this for years, ever since he met his uncle. His poor, kind, sad uncle. The Jinchūriki before him. His uncle had been a gentle soul, one who fought continuously against the Mizukage’s desire to use his own brother as a weapon for the village. When Utakata had gone missing Yagura’s oldest uncle had only intensified his desire to use Sanbi as a weapon.

The Mizukage’s death in the war had not been at the hands of their enemies. But nobody would ever know. Nobody human anyway, as Yagura had already become allies with Isobu when he killed his uncle. Nobody would ever guess that Yagura, who was almost as gentle as his Jinchūriki
uncle, Yagura who was stronger than the former Mizukage but kinder and less prone to anger, Yagura teacher of the poor traumatised Mei who had found her mother's corpse after her mother went on a honeypot mission and her body been dumped on the border of Mist, would commit treason and kill his Mizukage.

If his Mizukage uncle had mentioned using Isobu as a weapon again, if he had said that Mei would be tortured if he didn’t obey, if he had threatened Yagura’s mother and father who were paper ninja and almost as kind as his Jinchūriki uncle, if he had promised to make Yagura watch – only Isobu would ever know. And Isobu wasn’t going to tell anyone.

*

Yagura found himself floating in nothing. There was no light, no sound, no feeling, no scent, no taste. There was just nothing. There was nothing and there was him. Alone. Deprived. Lost. Trapped. Stuck in nothing.

He couldn’t remember. He couldn’t remember how he’d got there. He couldn’t remember what there was.

He screamed but the sound was only in his head. His fingers tore the skin of his arms and face as he tried to claw himself free of himself.

Yagura couldn’t feel Isobu. There was an empty feeling space where he had grown accustomed to feeling Isobu’s tempestuous chakra. His mind could not go to Isobu’s prison either. The doorway that led to the ocean cave of Isobu’s cage, was missing.

Yagura was lost. He was lost and afraid.

“Someone, help me!”

*

Yagura loathed the nothingness.

It was driving him mad. He could feel it. Deprivation of everything but his memories and his conscious was starting to affect him.

He missed training with Mei, seeing her shy smiles and glances from behind her hair. He missed laughing with her over curry and seeing her forget her self-awareness and light up with joy. He missed his mother and her sharp logical mind. He missed his father and his low, rumbling voice. He missed Isobu’s dry wit commenting on Yagura’s random thoughts.

He missed other things too. Things he had never really thought about before. The scent of seaweed on the rocks, the taste of peaches, the feeling of raindrops pounding his skin, the sound of a shamisen, the light falling on Kirigakure in the early morning when the sun was rising and the mist was incandescent with soft colours.

“Help.”

The taste of grilled fish.

“Help.”

The feeling of Mei’s hand on his arm.
“Help.”

The haunting call of the cranes that haunted the rivers.

“Help.”

The sparkle of salt dried in the saltpans, sharp and white like snow.

“Help.”

The smell of his mother’s perfume. The one she always, always wore.

“Please! Don’t leave me alone!”

*

Yagura muttered to himself. Over and over. He thought about problems he needed to solve. He solved them. He thought about Mei’s training, and her younger friend/ally/sparring partner Momichi. He came up with different training schemes and schedules.

He thought about previous fights he had been in, turning his actions over and over in his head, looking at his reactions and his enemies, thinking of how many different choices he could have made.

He recalled memories from his childhood, sitting at his Jinchūriki uncle’s knee, listening to him sing fishing songs. He remembered mending fishing nets with his obaa-san. He remembered his obaa-san teaching him how to free dive. He remembered finding corals, starfish, crabs, urchin, octopus and clams. He remembered his father’s strong hands showing him how to form the kanji of his name. He remembered the dry chapped lips of one of his classmates, his first kiss, a firm pressing of lips. He remembered the euphoria of mastering his coral jutsu. He remembered throwing up after his first kill. He remembered learning the constellations in the night sky and his mother telling him the myths of them, the shimmering stars seeming to dance and move with her words.

Yagura stayed in the nothingness and remembered. It was all he could do. It was all he was. He needed to stay him. And if he didn’t remember and think, he feared he might become nothing too.

*

Yagura was tired.

He was so very, very tired.

He was in the nothingness and the nothingness was winning. He wanted to stop. To stop trying to be Yagura. To stop being.

He stopped. He stopped thinking and solving and remembering. He curled up and closed his eyes.

He gave up.

“Nobody’s coming.”

*

The striking of strings. A melody ripping into the nothingness.
Yagura flinched at the sound. It seemed harsh and cruel after the nothingness. It made his ears hurt. He wanted it to stop.

A fast melody formed, the notes shredding the nothingness and obliterating it. Golden light blossoming around him like wildfire. Warmth flooded into his flesh, his bones. His ears ached, his eyes wept, and his body thrummed with energy.

He could smell salt, sakura blossoms, grass, wind, soil and feel a summer’s breeze teasing at his limbs, encouraging him to unfurl from the foetal position he had succumbed to.

His weeping eyes blinked against the gold light that surrounded him. He licked his lips and tasted. He tasted. Grilled fish, curry, honey, peaches.

“Are you ready to come out of the darkness, Yagura?”

A hand extended from the golden light.

Yagura’s body quivered.

“This isn’t real.” His voice was raspy. It sounded old, weary, tortured, full of disbelief and fragile exquisite hope.

“How do you know?”

“Because there’s only nothing. I’ve gone mad. Just like Isobu thought I would.”

“Take my hand Yagura. I will lead you from the nothing.”

Yagura shook his head.

“I’m tired.”

“I know Hatchling.” The voice crooned. Yagura wanted it to stop. He wanted it to go away and take its tantalising hope and promise of freedom with it. He wanted to stop; he was so tired.

“I know you’re tired Hatchling, you’ve been so strong for so long. But, if you can find one last morsel of strength, take my hand, then I will be your strength. I will help you banish the nothingness.”

Yagura whimpered. If he took the hand would it go away? Or would it stay and torment him more?

His hand unfurled, he didn’t remember his fingers being so calloused. Had he always had that scar across his knuckles?

He reached out to the steady hand hovering near him. He saw the iridescent polish shimmering on nails, it looked like the stars his mother had told him about.

Warm skin on his fingertips.

Yagura gasped. His hand clenched the other hand, bruising it with his intensity.

It was real.

“Well done, Hatchling.”

Energy surged into him, pouring into every crevice of him, flooding him with warmth, power,
light, sound, smell, touch, taste. Yagura grasped on tightly.

The nothingness was pushed from him, forced out of his body and mind as a tsunami of power cascaded into him and over him.

Yagura felt hands pressing into his shoulders, touching his arms, his back.

He opened his eyes and stared into the face of a woman who he knew as intimately as he knew himself. For she had poured herself through him and chased the nothingness away.


Bodies pressed into him, welcoming him, loving him.

“Welcome back Hatchling.”

Yagura tilted his head back and stared up at the impossibly blue sky, peppered with white clouds.

His breath whispered from him.

“Tadaima.”

He could hear the smile in his sibling Jinchūriki’s voices.

“Okaeri nasai.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Tadaima – I’m home
Okaeri nasai – welcome back

Next Chapter - Tsunade Part Six:
Tsunade is kicking ass (of course) until Kisame is injured. Despite missing an arm (and more injuries) Kisame can still snark. Time for Tsunade to gamble once more, only this time the bet is Kisame's life.
Chapter Summary

Tsunade is kicking ass (of course) until Kisame is injured. Despite missing an arm (and more injuries) Kisame can still snark. Time for Tsunade to gamble once more, only this time the bet is Kisame's life.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all every subscription, bookmark, kudos and comment.

Content Warning: description of injuries - not extremely graphic but includes dismemberment and eye wounds.

Also, I'm not a doctor. I did research a little bit for this chapter but my main source of medical knowledge comes from watching medical dramas which are not accurate. Please don't shout at me if things are wrong. Besides, Tsunade is using energy to heal so, you know, willing suspension of disbelief and all that jazz.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tsunade

(Part Six)

* 

Tsunade had forgotten how battle could make her feel. She felt simultaneously undefeatable and terrified. Controlling her strength so as not to severely damage Kirigakure’s buildings and infrastructures was taking a level of mastery she hadn’t had to employ since rebuilding Uzushiogakure.

Dodging, weaving, bobbing and slamming her chakra-enhanced blows into her opponents made her blood sing. She had missed being a shinobi. Punching the lights out of drunkards and eluding her debt-collectors wasn’t a patch on true combat.

But Tsunade hadn’t forgotten what inevitably came with conflict.

Standing in the street, blood smattered and splattered on her face, chest, hands, arms and her gaze locked on Kisame’s wavering body, she couldn’t move. She could barely breathe.

Kisame, her sparring partner, her fellow to drink and commiserate with about all of Uzu’s brats, her closest equal (aside from the Bijuu) in terms of strength and her apprentice’s lover was grinning at her through blood-stained teeth.

His arm had been severed in the explosion and it lay limp and cold at her feet. Shrapnel piercing his torso and legs and one eye almost ripped from his head.
Tsunade wanted to do something. Breathing would be a start, but it felt as if someone had reached into her chest and was squeezing her lungs, constricting pressure preventing oxygen from flowing. The shakes had set in and all she could do was stare and whine as unconsciousness beckoned her.

“You’re definitely getting slow in your old age hag.” Kisame’s voice pierced the whining noise in her head.

He sounded pained but still mocking.

“So, reckon now’s the time you gotta face your fear. Otherwise I’m dead.”

A cough and blood sprayed onto the ground mixed with spit. Staining more rocks and debris in its glistening crimson veil.

Kisame staggering, swaying, falling to his knees – hard. Toppling forward onto his side, the ragged stump of his arm mocking her and pooling blood beneath him. A pained wheeze as the sharp chunks of wood, stone and metal from the building were pushed into his body again.

Tsunade whimpered, her gaze fixed on Kisame. His head twisting to face her, his eye hanging from a mess of muscle and bone and blood.

“Its all good though. Tsunade. If you can’t fix me. Don’t blame you. But, can you pass a message on to Shizune?” more bloody coughs, wheezing and rattling in his throat. “Tell her – tell her…”

Silence falling from his lips.

The crackle of flames from all around.

A wordless scream torn from her chest and air rushing into her lungs. Energy and power pouring through her again.

A trembling hand picking up the severed arm and then staggering to her feet. Tripping and floundering to his side.

Rolling him over. Years and years of medical training kicking in after a long absence. Chakra coating her hands in green light and energy.

“Airway clear. Patient unconscious due to pain and trauma. Stem the blood flow, reattach the arm, reconstruct the face, ensure the eye is secure once more. Once stabilised remove the shrapnel, heal the intrusions. Ensure nervous system is fully functional and brain activity is stable before increasing blood cells reproduction.”

Tsunade rattled off her operation procedure and got to work. Her hands trembling slightly, her hair sticking to the back of her neck as sweat beaded there.

“Bone reconnected, muscle and ligaments reattached. Nerves fused together once more. Regrowing skin.”

An enemy could have landed next to her and Tsunade wouldn’t have stopped. Kisame’s life was in her hands. The stupid brat had so many more years to live, he shouldn’t have shielded her from the explosion when she had already lived a long life. The enemy’s last desperate move had levelled a (thankfully empty) street and left Tsunade watching as Kisame took the detritus and damage, guarding her like the inherent protector he was.

When he was well again, she was going to pound his ass into the ground.
“Tsunade-oba-chan!” Konan’s voice pierced Tsunade’s concentration. She didn’t stop healing Kisame however, pouring her energy and concentration into him.

“How can we assist?” Yahiko asked. Tsunade glanced at the Ame Trio who were torn between watching her and setting up a perimeter.

“I’ve got this.” Tsunade said.

“Damn straight you have.” Nagato all but shouted. “You can do this Tsunade-ba-chan.”

Nagato’s blindfolded eyes couldn’t have seen the tremble in her hands, the quiver of her lip, the blood dripping off her face and trickling down her arms, but he could hear the trepidation in her voice.

His solid belief, despite years and years of knowing that she couldn’t even stand the sight of a papercut, was a boost to her confidence.

“You’ve got this,” Konan pressed her hand to Tsunade’s shoulder. “And we’ve got you.”

“That’s right. Focus on healing up Kisame-nii so that you can kick his ass later.” Yahiko grinned, his teeth white and bright shining from the soot and dirt that caked his face.

Tsunade nodded and sent her own weak smile at the two who could see.

The Ame Trio took up position around her and her patient. A defensive triangle.

Their presence and their belief and their love was the encouragement Tsunade needed and the last vestiges of her fear trickled to an inaudible memory. This would not be like last time. She would not loose Kisame, like she had lost Dan. She was older, stronger, wiser and this time she knew what would happen if she failed. She would not go back to that place, that dark, grief-filled existence dulled with alcohol.

She was Tsunade-hime, one of the Legendary Sannin, the greatest Healer since Hashirama-jii-chan, the leading authority in the Five Great Nations on most medical practices, the pioneer who had reduced shinobi deaths on missions by half due to her insistence on assigning a medic to each team. She was sister to Nawaki, fiancée to Dan, granddaughter of Hashirama Senju, granddaughter of Mito Uzumaki, oba-chan to many and a child of Uzushio and Konoha.

We believe in you, Tsunade. A familiar voice crooned in her ear. Uzushio’s voice. Even as Uzu fought to save her children she could still be present at Tsunade’s rebirth. You have always had it within you, now you have the motivation to win. We are with you, you are not alone.

She would win this gamble.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Yagura Part Two:
The Jinchuriki and Bijuu are having a family reunion. Yagura knows some things that
he shouldn't know. The Jinchuriki and their Bijuu have a confab about the events leading up to Yagura's mind control. They aren't happy.
Chapter Summary

The Jinchuriki and Bijuu are having a family reunion. Yagura knows some things that he shouldn't know. The Jinchuriki and their Bijuu have a confab about the events leading up to Yagura's mind control. They aren't happy.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yagura

(Part Two)

* 

Yagura felt – different. His time in the nothingness had changed him, certainly. And having Uzukaa-sama pouring herself and her energy through him to dispel had changed him too. But there was something else.

When their family embrace finally ended and his new siblings (and he had always wanted to have siblings) retreated to introduce themselves at a reasonable distance, Yagura was surprised at the sweaty faces staring back at him.

Some of them also bore cuts, scrapes and bruises. But he could see no serious or concerning wounds.

“Did I do that?” He asked tentatively.

“Wasn’t really you Yagura-nii.” Yugito linked her hands behind her back and bent forward charmingly.

“Yugito-chan is right. You were under the influence of a genjutsu.” Han said solemnly.

“Still, sorry.” Yagura offered.

“Wasn’t you pulling the strings.” Rōshi grumbled and crossed his arms across his barrel-like chest. “Don’t accept the blame that lies on the puppet master.”

“You have more pressing matters to consider anyway, Yagura-nii.” Utakata grinned. “For starters, why don’t you meet Isobu – properly.”

Yagura blinked and spun around on the waves they were all riding with chakra.
Bijuu. There were five Bijuu gathered behind their group. Bijuu not sealed inside human bodies and imprisoned. And there was Isobu.

Yagura ran across the waves nimbly, skidding to a stop and sending a plume of water soaring at his halt. Matatabi (and Yagura knew them all because Uzu knew them all and she had poured herself through Yagura) hissed and skittered away, her flaming fur bristling.

Isobu laughed, sounding like pebbles rolling after a wave on the shore.

“Isobu!”

“Yagura. I am glad you are well. Mother was concerned when I was freed, and my chakra couldn’t break the genjutsu on you.”

“But how are you free?” Yagura didn’t know. Uzu’s thoughts and memories were fading away. Her knowledge only a faint ghostly imitation of what had been, mere seconds earlier, crystal clear in his mind. “And why don’t I know when I know all of the Bijuu’s names?”

Isobu lifted out his hand and Yagura clambered on, being raised to Isobu’s eye level. It felt like years since he had sat with Isobu like this and the last time had been in Yagura’s mind.

“To answer your first question, Mother altered the seal. She has done the same to the others. I remain tethered to you, you are my Jinchūriki still, but now I can manifest beyond your mind. I can swim in the ocean for the first time in nearly a century.”

Yagura laughed rapturously. He could feel Isobu’s euphoria and saw the turtle’s memory. That had literally been the first thing Isobu had done once the seal was altered. He had sunk below the waves to capture Yagura and bring his Jinchūriki to a stop.

Kokuō stepped forward to sniff Yagura.

“Our squishy is really small Isobu. Yugito-chan is taller than him and she’s still growing.”

The Bijuu chuckled as Yagura fumed and pouted silently.

“Mother and the others fought us and managed to stop us in Bijuu mode long enough for the others to disrupt my chakra flow and break the genjutsu on me through your seal. Mother took the opportunity. She has said it is only temporary. I will be returned to your body if you do not wish for the seal to remain changed.”

Yagura frowned and looked intently into Isobu’s eye.

“Why wouldn’t I want you to have freedom, or at least the best possible version we can achieve?”

Isobu blinked slowly. Yagura was reminded of their first meeting long ago. A smile formed on his face, making his cheeks ache with its voracity.

“Again, you surprise me Yagura. You would allow Mother to make the change permanent?”

“Of course. We’re allies right? Friends too. I want you to be free.”

Saiken burbled happily and Son Goku chittered. Matatabi had returned to their group and she let out a satisfied purr as she lifted Uzu up on her paw, passing the woman over to Isobu’s carefully.

“Are you certain Yagura-kun? Once I alter the seal it cannot be undone. I drained the chakra from the genjutsu on you to temporarily alter your seal, but this time I would be using your combined
chakra and threading a miniscule amount of mine in too. It will remain this way until your death.”

Yagura thought for a second. He could feel Isobu’s trepidation.

“When I die can I release the seal fully? I don’t want to drag Isobu into death with me.”

Uzu’s lips curled up and Yagura stared at the dimple in her cheek.

“Yes. Yes, you will be able to open the seal fully and free Isobu completely.”

“Then yes. Alter the seal permanently. Until my death Isobu will be as free as I can make him.”

“You are very kind Yagura.” Isobu said in awe.

“I’m just doing what’s right.”

* 

As Uzu altered the seal, the other Jinchūriki took seats on their Bijuu and chatted happily to Yagura. They told him about their whole ‘epic’ battle. How they had taunted him from the tower and led him away from Kirigakure to minimise damage to his village. How the Bijuu had manifested as soon as it was safe and they had tackled Sanbi Bijuu Mode, wearing Yagura and Isobu down until they had pinned them against a cliff, above the water and Uzu had used a seal to pull the foreign chakra keeping Isobu in a genjutsu and altered the seal.

How Isobu had been disorientated and sunk to the bottom of the ocean for a long time and the Jinchūriki had taken their turn to fight Yagura, the Bijuu preventing him from retreating back to Kiri or fleeing. How they were impressed with his coral prison and how Rōshi had accidentally made a new miniature island with his lava.

Uzu listened to her children chattering. Yagura was listening to his new siblings (and it still felt amazing to have siblings) but also feeling what Uzu was doing to the seal on his back. She was painting her chakra onto his skin, such a tiny fragment of the power that had surged through him being carefully brushed against him.

“A moment please.” She called and Bijuu and Jinchūriki fell silent at once.

“This will take longer than it did when I altered the other’s seals. They were altered when I was able to resonate with the other part of me. My power is not as strong as it is on Uzushio. You may also feel a slight discomfort, like hunger pangs. And you will probably be hungry as I am going to be using your chakra more than I did for the others. My apologies for any unpleasantness.”

Uzu rested her hand on Yagura’s shoulder and squeezed. “Last chance to change your mind.”

“I’m not going to change it Okaa-sama.”

“Very well.”

Her hand left his shoulder and returned to press on his back. Both of her hands felt soothing on his back and there was a slight judder and Yagura gasped.

He could feel the seal altering. His chakra and Isobu’s being pulled through the seal, twisted and twined together like a braided rope with a core of Uzu’s chakra running through the centre. His body seemed to thrum as the seal was changed.

It didn’t hurt at all, but Yagura felt the hunger pangs as Uzu had warned he might. He felt as if he
hadn’t eaten for hours. His stomach seemed to rumble and the urge to eat grilled fish and peaches filled him.

To distract himself he continued speaking to his siblings and the Bijuu.

“How come I know your names but I’m forgetting everything else that I knew when Uzu-kaa-sama poured her energy through me?”

The Jinchūriki shrugged and turned to the Bijuu. Kokuō and Matatabi shared glances with Saiken and Son shifting uncomfortably.

Kokuō seemed to be volunteered and she flicked her five tails once before settling down.

“You are forgetting because you must forget. You know the Bijuu’s appearances, names and history now because you are intrinsically bound to Isobu. If you retained the rest of Mother’s knowledge however… Well… Mother is ancient. She is older than us. She is older than the Jūbi, than the Sage of Six Paths.”

“Why does that mean he has to forget?” Utakata frowned.

“How much knowledge and memories do you think Mother has if she is ancient?” Saiken burbled, his eye-stalks bending backwards to peer at Utakata.

“A lot.” Rōshi grouched.

“Exactly.” Kokuō silenced them. “More knowledge, history, memories, thoughts and feelings than any human has ever had or felt. A human brain is not designed to take that much. It would drive you insane or destroy your mind completely. You would essentially cook your mind. That is why you are forgetting. Because Mother made sure you would when she freed you.”

Yagura swallowed. He wasn’t so upset about forgetting now. He knew the important things, like the Bijuu and his other siblings. He preferred his brain not be cooked.

“If a human brain can’t take that much knowledge,” Yugito said slowly. “Then how come Uzu-nee hasn’t cooked her brain? She’s human.”

Matatabi purred comfortingly. They could all hear the concern in Yugito’s voice and see her fist tightening in Matatabi’s flames.

“Mother isn’t human. She’s a construct of a human body.” Son rumbled reassuringly. “She may look human, but she isn’t. Right Mother?”

Uzu made a noise of agreement but didn’t speak, keeping her attention on Yagura’s seal.

“Well, that explains most things.” Yagura announced. The younger Jinchūriki chuckled and even Rōshi smiled.

* *

“What do you remember Yagura-san?” Han’s deep voice asked after a long silence.

Yagura turned from where he had been watching the ocean and a pod of dolphins that were bursting from the waves and calling to each other. He never thought he would be so excited to see dolphins but after the nothingness dolphins seemed miraculous.

“Remember?”
“About the genjutsu caster?”

Yagura snarled.

“I don’t remember much at all. I at home. I had just got back from the office. It was dark in my house, but I could smell something different. I remember turning around. Something had appeared behind me. I swung but my hand didn’t make contact with anything and then all I can remember is an eye. A red and black eye. Then I was in the nothingness and that’s all I know.”

The Jinchūriki and Bijuu rumbled and shifted agitatedly.

“Was it? Was it what we think it was? Mother?” Son chattered and pounded his fist on the ocean’s surface. This time Matatabi didn’t flinch away from the water but bared her teeth in a snarl.

“Settle Son. We wait.”

Yonbi grumbled but sank back onto his haunches, no longer posturing angrily. Rōshi perched on his head looked relieved and angry.

Yagura saw that Yugito was biting her lip nervously and playing with a bell in her hair, her thumb rubbing the curve of the opening repeatedly.

The drain on Yagura and Isobu’s chakra finally slowed before stopping.

“It is done.” Uzu said wearily, slumping back on Isobu’s paw. Her arms flopped out either side of her and her hair tumbled off his paw to float in the sea breeze.

Yagura twisted and kneeled next to her, staring at her pale face and closed eyes.

“Are you alright Okaa-sama?”

“If I decide to alter a Jinchūriki seal when not on Uzushio, remind me how tiring it is?”

Son could wait no longer.

“Mother. Was it the Sharingan? Did an Uchiha put Isobu and Yagura under a genjutsu?”

Uzu stayed silent.

“Mother?!”

“Possibly.”

They all went still.

“But the main question is, why? Why put Yagura and Isobu under a genjutsu? Was it to gain control of the village? There are less exhaustive ways to do so. And the other question is, who? Was it an Uchiha? Or was it a dojutsu that we haven’t encountered yet?”

“Madara Uchiha could control Bijuu with his Sharingan.” Utakata noted.

“Indeed. But the Uchiha are loyal to Konoha, for now. How would they benefit from controlling a Jinchūriki not in their village? And kekkai genkai, dojutsu and bloodlines are evolving. Shinobi now are not the same as they were when Indra awoke his Sharingan. There have been mutations in shinobi and humans.”
“What are you saying Uzu-sama?” Han asked.

“We cannot say this was an Uchiha because it could be that someone else has developed the ability to control Bijuu through genjutsu. Pointing fingers and accusing the Uchiha will not get us anywhere. And I will not go to war with Konoha. Not now, when Naruto needs us. If we start accusing them of influencing the Mizukage we will never get near him. And I will not allow him to grow up alone.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Yagura Part Three:
Yagura prepares to potentially lose his position as Mizukage. He dreads seeing his village but knows that Mama Uzu and his new siblings have his back. Mei cries - a lot. Mama Uzu offers a handkerchief and something else too.
Yagura - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Yagura prepares to potentially lose his position as Mizukage. He dreads seeing his village but knows that Mama Uzu and his new siblings have his back. Mei cries - a lot. Mama Uzu offers a handkerchief and something else too.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every subscription, bookmark, kudos and comment!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yagura

(Part Three)

Returning to Kirigakure Yagura felt trepidation swelling up in him. His hands felt clammy around his staff and his mouth felt dry.

During their return journey Utakata had calmly informed him of what had befallen his people and village during his impairment. He felt sick that his body and voice had been used to kill off kekkai genkai users and bloodlines.

He would send out messages to all settlements and Kiri shinobi and order them to cease the slaughter. He would not endorse, condone or allow further slaughter of innocents because of their abilities.

“It wasn’t your fault Yagura. You did not give the order.” Isobu comforted from within his mind.

They had all agreed that returning with the Bijuu inside them once more was the best strategic move. Yagura didn’t want to appear as if he was leading Bijuu to decimate the village and the rebellion. After the last year or so of his reign of terror, the last thing his people needed was to see five chakra beasts that they considered monsters coming towards them.

“I may not have thought of it, but it was my body and mouth that gave the order.” Yagura replied.

“Instead of beating yourself up for something that wasn’t your fault and feeling guilty about it,” Rōshi barked. “think about what you’re going to do to fix things instead. It wasn’t you, but what can you do to fix things or make them a bit better? You can’t bring the dead back, but you can try and do what you wanted to all along, make Kiri less bloody and peaceful.”

Yagura heard Rōshi yelp as Han’s fist thunked him on the head. There were spat whispers and hisses as the Jinchūriki scolded the short man. Yagura felt his lips curving up in a smile and his spine straightened.
“You’re right Rōshi-san.”

“He is?” Utakata said with a concerned look on his face.

“I can’t change what’s happened, and you’re right. I can’t bring the dead back.”

Yagura didn’t notice Uzu curling her lips inwards and suppressing a nose wrinkle.

“But I can affect what happens next. If the rebels will believe you and let me try.”

“If Uzu-sama says you were under a genjutsu they’ll believe you.” Rōshi grumbled. “The woman’s almost got a cult going on. Most of the rebels adore her.”

“Like you don’t Rōshi-ji-chan!” Yugito purred. “You love us all too!”

“No, I don’t. Don’t confuse me with Kisame.”

*

The figures waiting at the main gate were a mixture of unfamiliar and familiar ones to Yagura. His heart throbbed at the sight of Mei and Zabuza. They were taller (much taller) than the last time he remembered seeing them.

Yagura straightened up, readjusted his staff on his back and marched onward. At his side, walking ever so slightly behind him was Uzu. Her long robes were pristine, her hair flowing down her back and the bells in her hair jangling and chiming with every click of her okobo.

Her presence was a comfort and Yagura was glad she had allowed him to take the lead. He needed to approach first. Demonstrate that he was himself again and that he had the support of Uzu and her family, not that they were taking the lead because he needed defending or containing.

He halted them a few feet from the group, his eyes scanning over the assembled rebels. He recognised many of them: Mei, Zabuza, Aō, Mangetsu to name a few. He also noticed that there weren’t many of the older shinobi, the jounin who had been hardcore loyalists to his uncle, the former Mizukage.

When he was placed under the genjutsu, Yagura had been carefully and slowly removing the traditionalists from positions of power. Retiring them or moving them to being instructors at the academy under careful supervision. It had been a slow process however as he needed to keep them content and at the time lacked the support to remove and replace them all in a swift change up.

Now it seemed they had been removed from power either through their own machinations or by the rebels.

Yagura swallowed and looked at Mei. The girl’s lower lip was quivering and her hair was pulled back from one side of her face, for the first time showing off her elegant features. Yagura felt a smile forming. She looked so like her mother, a kunoichi with fierce strength and character and beauty.

“Mei…” He murmured. The words wouldn’t come.

But they didn’t have to as Mei let out a sob and launched herself at her sensei. Yagura caught her and wrapped his arms around her waist. Both of them burying their heads in the other’s shoulder and Yagura’s body shook with Mei’s sobs.
“I missed you Yagura-sensei!” She wailed. “I’m so happy you’re back!”

“You fixed him?” Zabuza growled and looked at Uzu.

She shrugged. “It was as we theorised. He is no longer under the influence of a genjutsu. He is your Mizukage once more.”

“You cannot decide that, respectfully Uzu-sama.” Aō interrupted. Yagura looked up from Mei’s shoulder with red-rimmed eyes at his advisor. “This is a Kiri matter. We are grateful for your assistance, however whether Yagura-sama remains the Mizukage is for us and the Daimyo to decide.”

Uzu raised an eyebrow imperiously and Yagura heard several of the group watching snigger.

“We will not interfere in your matters, as we already agreed. However, Yagura-kun’s actions were not his own. He has been trapped in a genjutsu for nearly two years. If you decide you cannot recover from the actions of your enemy and continue with Yagura-kun as your Mizukage, well, I have an alternative proposition.”

Aō swallowed. “Proposition?”

“Yagura-kun would become the liaison, ambassador, whatever fancy term you want to give it, to Uzushiogakure. I have been made aware of your desire for an alliance between our nations. But I will only accept Yagura-kun as a liaison if you no longer deem him suitable to be Mizukage.”

“Is that a threat?”

“If Uzu-nee was threatening you, you would know.” Yugito scoffed loudly and was hushed by the other Jinchūriki. “What? He would!”

“It’s not a threat. It is an alternative option should your council come to the aforementioned decision. And Yagura-kun will be free to take up the post or not. It is his decision. Whatever happens, whatever you decide, whatever he decides, he is a part of our family. He will always have a place on Uzushio and amongst my children.”

There was a disturbance from the rear of the group watching the unfolding stand off between Uzu and Aō.

Yagura watched as several unfamiliar shinobi pushed through, parting the Kiri citizens who stood aside and bowed respectfully.

“Okaa-chan!” Several of them cried.

“I see you are all well.” Uzu smiled and ran her eyes over them all, noticing the small cuts, scrapes and bruises that were the result of their work.

“Not all of us. Kisame-nii was injured.” A young boy scowled and pushed his glasses up on his face.

Tension suddenly filled the air and Yagura felt you could have cut it with a knife.

“What happened? Is he alright? Where is he?” Yugito darted forward to interrogate them.

“Calm down kitten.”

Yagura tipped his head back slightly to stare at a face he had not seen in many years. Kisame
Hoshigaki. Blue-skinned, sharp-toothed and bigger than ever. Aside from being larger, broader, taller and a thick scar that looked fresh bisecting his eye socket and cheek, he looked similar to how he had been nine years ago when he renounced the village and took Samehada.

“Hoshigaki.”

“Yagura. Glad you’re not a psychotic bloodline killer anymore.”

You could have heard a pin drop in the sharp silence that fell suddenly.

The women bracing Kisame up on their shoulders exchanged looks and the dark-haired one hissed angrily at him.

“What? It was a joke. Too soon?”

Yagura felt a laugh building up in his belly and it ripped its way free from his throat and broke the tense atmosphere. It wasn’t really a matter to laugh about, he would spend the rest of his life (however long that was) atoning for the deaths that had been inflicted upon his orders (because no matter what anyone said, it was his voice, his lips and his hand that had given the order) but in that moment Kisame’s honest and dry voice was just what he needed to hear.

“See, the Mizukage finds it funny!” Kisame protested.

“He might not be the Mizukage anymore.” Utakata piped up.

Kisame scowled.

“If he’s not going to be the Mizukage then why in the name of the Sage did I just get my arm ripped off, almost lost my eye and get peppered with shrapnel?”

“They need to have a conversation and decide if Yagura-nii is suitable to remain as Mizukage,” Han dropped in casually.

Mei had finished blubbering and pulled away from Yagura’s embrace, wiping at her tears with her long dirty sleeves, smudging the dark mascara and dirt over her cheekbones. Uzu tutted and handed her a handkerchief.

“Women’s clothing should never be used for wiping tears. Unless they are a child’s.” She instructed and Mei nodded.

“Stop it.” Kisame growled warningly. Uzu looked at him and blinked.

“Stop what?”

“You know what you’re doing. You’ve already picked one up now, and you’ve given him a nickname by now. You filled your quota for the year. No more.”

Yagura glanced at Rōshi.

“Do I want to know?”

Rōshi shook his head and rolled his eyes, yawning seconds later. “Nah, you’ll find out soon enough.”

“Are we going to stand around here for the rest of the day?” A pale-skinned and haired teen inquired. “Only you Kiri shinobi have a village to begin returning to rights, civilians to return to
their homes and the upper echelons of you need to decide whether Yagura-nii is going to be your Mizukage or if you need to elect an acting one. We will retire to our camp so that Kisame-nii and the rest of us simple humans are out of your way. Once you have made your decision, kindly send Mei-chan to inform us of your decision. Uzushio will then offer aid in rebuilding and begin talks to discuss an alliance and the conditions and parameters of said alliance.”

Yagura grinned. It seemed he had gained far more siblings than just the Jinchūriki. He liked this one. Maybe, if he remained Mizukage, he could poach this one from Uzu’s side. Then again, he saw the way the teen slyly smiled and winked at Uzu. Loyal to his bones, just like Kisame who was accepting Uzu’s fussing and scolding with minimal grumpiness.

He had always wanted one sibling. Now it seemed he had many. He couldn’t wait to get to know them.

Me too. Isobu chimed in. Mother’s offer is generous. Will you accept?

Yagura shrugged. If they decide I am unsuitable then I might. I might decide to leave Kiri permanently if they decide Mizukage should pass to someone else. My, our, presence may complicate matters. Besides, part of me wants to find the bastard that turned me on our village.

Agreed. Isobu growled. But let’s wait and see. I don’t think they will replace you. Especially with the way the princely one implied that Uzushiogakure’s alliance would be dependent on your reinstatement. Mother is a powerful ally. Kiri won’t want to lose her or you.

Why would she do that though? Why would any of them?

Because – they are family. We are family. We are not alone and if that Sharingan wielding scum returns we will not face them alone.

Yagura found himself walking into his village alongside Uzu. His hand shaking at his side and his steps unsteady.

Uzu’s warm hand slipped into his. Her slim fingers squeezed his and he could breath.

He would do all he could. Because, in the end, that’s really all he could do. What was right, what was just and what was necessary.

That’s what a Kage did.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Isobu:
Isobu reconnects with his siblings and Mama Uzu. Kisame and Tsunade are trolls. Uzu and the family ready themselves to leave Kiri after several months. Isobu can’t wait to find out what they do next.
Isobu

Chapter Summary

Isobu reconnects with his siblings and Mama Uzu. Kisame and Tsunade are trolls. Uzu and the family ready themselves to leave Kiri after several months. Isobu can't wait to find out what they do next.

Chapter Notes

Double Update tonight because we reached 500 kudos! Just under two months too! Thank you all so much for your feedback, support and kudos!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Isobu

* 

Isobu had missed his freedom. But he enjoyed Yagura’s company. Considering he had spent most of his life prior to being captured and sealed as a solitary creature, not even speaking to his siblings in centuries apart from that one instance when Chōmei flew over the bay he was calling home and he had been above the surface.

The ability to fly meant the Chōmei didn’t remain in the jungles Father had sent her to. Isobu couldn’t blame her though. The world was big and worth exploring. Isobu had spent centuries exploring his oceans, travelling further than any other Bijuu and seeing strange lands and ships and cities that seemed to float on the ocean. He always returned back to the oceans that were his however, even if he never returned to the oceans of his youth and the swirling whirlpools of his childhood.

Reunited with four of his siblings, Isobu felt content. They spent many nights in the gardens of Yagura’s home whilst their Jinchūriki and their human siblings and aunts and uncles were sequestered inside away from the cool night air, talking and sharing stories of their lives since Father’s death.

Months passed in this way and Isobu relearnt his siblings and their mannerisms. Saiken’s happy, burbly, squeaky voice was a cheery sound in the mornings. Matatabi’s aloof nature and affected disinterest were always betrayed by her ears which would point in the direction of her Jinchūriki and her siblings – keeping a watch on those dearest to her. Son’s grumpy grunts and his quick swings and leaps through the straggly trees in the garden were much less intense than they had been in his youth. Time had tempered Son’s attitude and movements although the monkey was still volatile in his moods.

Kokuō was actually the steadiest and calmest of all his siblings now. A change that deeply surprised Isobu. He remembered watching Kokuō leaving Uzushio. The first of them to leave, the wind and adventure beckoning her across the sea. He had been floating along beneath the waves
and chased her to the mainland where he lost sight of her as she leapt onto the shore and disappeared from view leaving only a wind in her wake.

Now his five-tailed sister was the peacemaker, the quiet one who was listened to carefully when she did deign to speak. She no longer ran everywhere, eager to learn and explore as if afraid she would miss something if she wasn’t quick. She was still fast as she demonstrated in their nightly games in the garden, but unless playing, Kokuō moved with an elegance and pace that her youth had lacked.

Centuries had changed them all, but at their core, they were the children who had frolicked under the watchful care of Uzushio and been named by Hagoromo. They were the Bijuu and they were content once more.

*

Mother and her family (her misfits, her monsters, her children) remained in Kiri for months. Assisting with the rebuilding of the village, the Ame trio accompanying Kiri Hunter Nin out of the village to round up the last of the old guard who wanted to keep the Mist bloody and stuck in the past.

Yagura was the Mizukage. Isobu had doubted they would demand his resignation and his Jinchūriki honourable and full of guilt and regret had offered to step down but was met with refusal by his new council.

Things were changing in Kiri already. Shinobi were kinder, gentler, less savage in only a few months. Mother’s presence and her demonstrative, open affection towards her children and towards all shinobi and civilian alike, set an example that rippled through the village.

Isobu loved watching through Yagura’s eyes as the smallest squishies, the youngest humans were led into play by Yugito. Running and playing in the streets in a way that had never happened before in Kirigakure. People greeted each other with smiles and not with snarls and scowls.

That wasn’t to say that Kiri was suddenly a peaceful utopia. They were still a shinobi village with warriors and killers. There were scuffles and arguments and injuries. But the death toll had already vastly reduced.

Kisame and Tsunade had made a sign that hung beside the entrance of the Mizukage Tower. A bright sign that had space for numbers to be written in. It currently read

“32 days without a death!”

It was bold and ugly and bright and silly yet it seemed to be working too. Previously it had read 77 days, but then there had been an altercation between bitter clans who decided to revert to the old way of resolving an argument. Fights to the death had once again been made illegal within Kiri.

Isobu’s most entertaining viewing moments were however when Yagura and Ao and another shinobi who’s name Isobu could never remember, sat down with Uzu, Utakata and Kimimaro to negotiate the alliance between Uzushiogakure and Kiri.

Isobu loved seeing Uzu’s smile thin and then listening to her clear scolds as Ao and the other shinobi tried to pull a fast one over on Mother. Kimimaro was a surprisingly savvy negotiator and Mother often left him to handle the negotiations and terms. Utakata was acting as scribe and a third representative for Uzushio. Both teens were intelligent, calm and sly.

Just like Mother had taught them.
Yagura almost always felt amused during these talks and sometimes would let Ao take over just to join Isobu in his mind and they would comment on the interactions and watch as Ao was brought to heel by shinobi nearly half his age.

The alliance, once written up and agreed upon, was signed in front of an assembly of Kiri shinobi and all of Uzu’s family. The formal and dull ceremony was an insisted upon by Ao (Isobu hoped that he would loosen up after a while, otherwise he might just have to suggest that Yagura took on Zabuza as an advisor instead of a bodyguard, he would at least liven things up a bit). But afterwards there was a huge party that covered the whole village. Streets were full of tables and seats and food and music and dancing and laughter and light. The mist held off and the sun shone brightly down on their celebrations and Isobu felt Yagura’s delight.

It had been a long, hard, guilt-filled few months. But now, Yagura’s vision, his dream for Kiri was starting to take form.

There was still much to do, but Isobu was there. He would help Yagura however he could. And they knew they weren’t alone. They had so many siblings now. And a Mother who would do anything for them too.

For the first time in nearly a century, Isobu didn’t regret being trapped inside a human. He knew down to his soul, that when Yagura did pass on (and he prayed to Hagoromo, to father that he would have many years with his Jinchūriki) he would grieve and mourn his friend.

Isobu no longer hated humans. They were amusing in their own way. And he could understand why Mother loved them.

They could be selfish, greedy, cruel, vile and horrifying. But, they were also kind, loving, caring, passionate, vibrant and beautiful. Such short lives, such fragile beings who clung on to every second of their time and lived.

It was beautiful.

* * *

“Mother. May I sit with you?” Isobu asked in the middle of the night when he found Mother sat with her legs in his pool and staring up at the moon.

He hauled his unwieldy frame out of the water onto the sandy shores. Yagura had changed the pond into a salt-water filled bay, giving Isobu a way into the garden and out to the open ocean. Isobu hadn’t known what to say but knew that Yagura felt his pleasure.

“Are you happy Isobu?” Mother said softly.

Isobu’s tails flicked.

“I am. Now.”

“I am glad. It does a mother’s heart good to hear her children are at peace and happy.”

“Must you leave? Your departure is the only thing that is currently causing me sorrow.”

Mother’s hand stroked over his spiky head, her fingers caressing his skin and trailing over his shell in a comforting motion.
“I have more children to find. And one who has just lost their family. He needs me.”

“**Kyuubi’s new Jinchūriki.**” Isobu breathed. “He will not be as you remember Mother. The humans hurt him deeply. Of all of us, his territory was most impacted by them and they tore his trees down to make their homes, seeded his ground with blood in their wars, pushed him further and further to the boundary and forced him to hide. He is anger now. Anger, rage and fury incarnate.”

“I know. I heard his cries and screams over the centuries. But he deserves peace. And Naruto does not deserve to suffer for the choices of Hashirama and Mito and Madara.”

“**Sometimes, I wish Father hadn’t sent us from you.**” Isobu whispered. “**We would have been safe with you Mother. We would never have suffered how we have.**”

“Maybe.” Mother agreed and cupped her hand beneath Isobu’s chin, lifting his head to look into her eyes. “But I, we, were too small to contain you long. And Hagoromo hoped that one day you and the humans would live in peace. It is new, small, fragile but you have begun that peace here. You and Yagura-kun. Together, you could change Kiri and Mizu’s opinions and attitudes. Not just towards Bijuu but towards each other.”

Isobu wept and nuzzled into Mother’s hand. She lay back on the sand and he draped his head and paws over her stomach.

Together they lay at stared up at the moon and the stars. Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, Mother would leave. Isobu’s siblings and new human family would leave. But for that moment, Isobu was content to watch the night and pour his love and affection onto Mother.

Parting would be sad, but he knew that it would not be the last time he saw Mother or his siblings. The world was changing. He could feel it in the water and the air and the earth.

Mother’s actions rippling out across the nations and changing life, not just for Bijuu, but for everyone.

She needed to carry on making ripples. And Isobu had ripples of his own to make.

*  

Chapter End Notes

Kakashi Part 1 will be posted shortly!
Kakashi Part One

Chapter Summary

Kakashi is a sad cupcake. He needs lots of hugs but won't allow himself to have them. He meets a stranger whilst on an Anbu mission. The stranger is... odd...

Chapter Notes

Double update! Make sure you've read the previous chapter Isobu before reading Kakashi.

Content Warning: PTSD, trauma, depression (basically Kakashi’s usual MO).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kakashi – Hound

(Part One)

*

He was drenched in it. He could smell the sharp tang of it, feel it between his fingers, under his nails, speckled across the exposed part of his face. His clothes were soaked in it, his hair absorbing it and he didn’t think he’d ever be able to get it off.

There was so much of it he thought it would choke him or that the scent would seep into him so deeply that everyone else would be able to smell it too. What new name would they give him once they could see and smell how utterly and completely covered in it he was? He was already the Sharingan Thief, Kakashi of the Sharingan, Friend Killer, Murderer...

What would they call him when the blood grew too much for him to hide? When he could no longer wash it away?

*

Minato-sensei and Kushina had been everything good. With them he could almost feel that he was clean – that the blood-drenched hands Kushina held, the soaked hair Minato-sensei ruffled, wasn’t as bad as he thought. That his filth and dirt wouldn’t stain others.

Then, they died.

And he was alone.

Hokage-sama wouldn’t let him near Naruto. Probably for the best, he had thought. Better to keep the Friend Killer away from sensei’s son. Kakashi never wanted his hands to dirty Naruto. But he wanted to see him so desperately. Did he look more like Minato-sensei or Kushina? Did he have dandelion blonde hair, or the vibrant red Minato had adored? Kakashi had known sensei had a
curled lock of Kushina’s hair, it was kept in a pocket, close to his heart and once when sensei was on watch during the war he had seen him take it out and press it to his lips.

Kakashi wondered if his parents had loved each other like that. His mother had died when he was too young. Would she have called him Friend Killer? Would his father?

His father’s blood had been the first to stain him, seeping across the floorboards of their home and sinking into his bare toes, then his hands as he grasped at his father, shaking him and calling out to him, even though he had known, he had known the second he opened the door but he had needed to check, because maybe Kakashi was enough, maybe he was enough to live for…

Now Kakashi did as he was ordered and stayed away from Naruto. He didn’t even ask after sensei’s son anymore. Hokage-sama would only give vague answers, but Genma had been put on the boy’s Anbu guard and whenever Kakashi bumped into him he would let Kakashi know that he was safe.

Kakashi had done vile things, killed so many to protect the village. He did his job, often alone without backup because if an assassin needed backup then they’d probably failed to eliminate the target. His father’s words, Obito’s words, sensei’s words, Rin’s words, the Hokage’s words, the villagers’ words all muddled through in his head when he wasn’t working. Over and over, again and again and again. He didn’t even know what was right anymore. But he would go out and kill for his village because that’s where the last of his precious people were.

Naruto, Gai, Genma, Asuma, Kurenai, Anko… His precious people whom he wanted to protect and keep clean. Because if he went on these missions and became soaked in blood, then they didn’t have to. And if he had stopped going to see Gai, no longer played shogi with Asuma or went for dango with Anko and Kurenai, no longer went around to Genma’s to watch bad romance movies, well – it was all to keep them clean.

*

Operative Hound hid in the shadows of a statue on the roof. The alarm had sounded five minutes ago and the entire fortress was now teeming with soldiers. He hadn’t caused the pandemonium. He knew that. He hadn’t reached his target yet.

Target: 38-year-old, male, son of a wealthy merchant. Been trading information about his parent’s clients to other nations and using connections to increase animosity against other traders. Also been visiting the red-light district and abusing the women working there. Last woman he paid for remains in a coma, unlikely to wake.

Further information: Target has a wife and a 6-year-old son. Both are unaware of Target’s nefarious business. Unnecessary to remove them unless no other possible course of action.

He had scoped out the veritable fortress the merchant son lived in with his wife and child. Explored every angle, observed the repulsive man’s habits.

Target likes to have a drink late in the evening, before visiting his wife’s room (Operative Hound had noted that the wife flinched when Target raised voice in anger. Target’s child is kept in rooms far from parents). Target drinks alone and always sits in the open window to look out at the sunset.

Operative Hound had decided that would be the best time for the assassination. When Target was most relaxed and guard was lowered as Target contemplated visiting his wife (Hound wouldn’t think about how the Target would get a malicious grin after the fifth cup of sake or the scream he had heard from the wife’s room).
Hound had been ready, waiting in the shadows of the room for the Target to appear and dismiss his guards to wait outside whilst he had his evening drink. But the alarm had sounded before the Target even entered the corridor outside and Hound had held position until the soldiers began clearing each room.

Now he was sat on the roof, waiting for an opportunity in all the chaos to take out the Target. He kept an eye on the soldiers as they shouted to each other and a cacophony broke out near the warehouse where the trading goods were kept.

Hound watched carefully. The Target appeared, apparently not concerned about a thief stealing from him (more concerned about getting his evening drink and getting ready to visit his wife). Hound leaned over the roof and slipped inside, hiding in the shadows.

He watched as the Target consumed his first cup of sake, second, third and then Hound struck. His mask illuminated by lightning and the chirping like a thousand birds drawing the Target’s attention and providing Hound with the perfect position. His hand drove into the Target’s chest, piercing him instantly. The Target saw Hound’s mask and knew death had come for him. The Target died with that ghostly mask filling his vision and the sound of a thousand birds calling.

Hound checked the Target was dead and then pushed the body off his hand. A sudden noise in the doorway and he spun, his hand ready to fling a kunai but he froze. The Target’s child was standing, looking, seeing the ghost in the mask and the body of his dead father, blood oozing across the tatami mat and soaking his feet.

Hound twisted and leapt from the window, landing hard on the roof opposite, tiles cracking under his body.

A piercing scream, the wail of a child who didn’t understand that their father was a monster, who didn’t know that their father was a traitor, who didn’t know that their father was anything other than the man who would play in the garden with him sometimes, ripped into the night air.

Hound fled, the soldiers aware of his presence and arrows being fired at him as he ran along rooftops and dodged spears. He had, had an exit point, several in fact but the thief hadn’t been apprehended and the soldiers had increased.

Hound skidded to a stop as a woman suddenly landed on the roof in front of him. Long robes echoing her movement, her feet balanced on okobo sticking the landing perfectly, dark hair braided and pinned to her head making it look like she was crowned with snakes. She looked up at him, he reeled back.

A kitsune mask stared back at him, not dissimilar to his own. A porcelain mask painted in black with golden markings and a golden grin smirking at him. Absently he noticed the bells ringing in her hair as she turned and ran towards him, her hand diving out and grabbing his wrist (his blood-soaked wrist) and she pulled him along with her.

He didn’t resist and followed along after stumbling briefly. An arrow clipped his shoulder and the woman jerked him out of the way of another. They ran towards the back of the fortress, an area that led out to a cliff overlooking the sea.

Hound felt a moment of hesitation before they leapt and fell freely through the air, waves rushing up towards them.

The water was bitterly cold. He resisted the urge to gasp and lose all his precious air. Kitsune was still holding to his wrist and she pulled him down instead of up.
They swam towards the cliff and into an underwater cave.

He breathed in deeply as his head broke the surface and Kitsune finally let go of his wrist. She tilted her head as he trod water and stared back.

Silence reigned, only broken by the sound of the lapping water echoing around the cave. Kitsune broke first, swimming towards a ledge and a dark tunnel that led back into the land away from the ocean entrance.

Hound stayed in the water. Whilst Kitsune had shown him no ill will, he didn’t know if it would be better to go back out towards the open sea or to follow her towards a tunnel he knew nothing about.

Kitsune had pulled herself out onto the ledge and was wringing out her Mo and long robes. Hound watched as she bent down and fiddled with the lamp she had obviously left there earlier, lighting a second small candle and sticking it in.

“You’re going to catch a cold if you stay in there.” Kitsune spoke.

Hound startled slightly. She sounded amused.

“I promise I won’t attack you. I didn’t earlier and I wouldn’t stand much chance against you anyway. It would be an exercise in futility.”

Hound decided to swim for the ledge, and he pulled himself out gratefully onto the firm ground. The cuts on his arm from using Chidori had been stinging in the water. Piercing through a person’s body wasn’t easy and bone had a habit of splintering into sharp points that would tear through flesh as easily as steel.

He crouched and let himself take in his surroundings and watch his temporary ally.

Shock filled him as she nonchalantly pushed her mask up and to the side, exposing her face. What kind of Anbu was she?

Her fingers finally twisted out as much of the water as possible from her clothing and she wrinkled her nose in displeasure at the heavy fabric.

“I had hoped to be able to leave the way I came, over the wall like I suspect you did. But this route is probably more effective now.” She picked up the lamp and indicated towards the tunnel. “This will come out over a mile away from the fortress. The soldiers won’t go that far, especially as I believe you have assassinated their employer’s son and will be concerned you might return to finish off the wife and child.”

Her voice was calm and matter of fact.

“Well, Anbu-san, shall we?”

Hound waited.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Or you can stay here and go back via the ocean entrance. Just be careful, the current has a nasty bite.”

Hound followed quietly. If she tried to betray him, he would kill her. There was already blood on his hands tonight.
Even the ocean couldn’t wash the smell and stain off.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kakashi Part Two:
Kakashi is still confused by the strange woman. He has another mission and this could be the one that breaks him.
Chapter Summary

Kakashi is still confused by the strange woman. He has another mission and this could be the one that breaks him.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

Content Warning: PTSD, trauma, depression, mentions of violence/cruelty

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hound – Kakashi

(Part Two)

*

The woman had told the truth. The tunnel did lead out beyond the fortress, deep in a thick copse in the nearby forest. The light from her lantern wouldn’t be seen easily.

“Here we go. As I said, safe and free.”

Hound nodded but stayed silent. The woman shrugged her shoulders.

“This is where we part ways Anbu-san. Take care of yourself, and sorry if my skulduggery caused you issues in completing your mission.”

She walked off into the trees, the light from her lantern bobbing along almost merrily.

Hound watched for a few seconds before leaping into the trees and heading back to report.

Mission: Target eliminated. No other casualties. Minimal injury to Operative Hound.

As he ran towards his village, he could smell the ocean mixed into the blood that stained his skin.

*

The next time he met Kitsune, Hound was in a worse state.

His mission had been awful. Not that most of them weren’t but this one had been particularly bad. A drugs ring hiding in the mountains. The thugs had taken control of a mountain village where their main source of income was special herbs. The men had been forced to work growing plants to create hallucinogenic and power-enhancing drugs. The children had been stuck in a house with little food or water. The women…
He had frozen when he found the women. They had been used in depraved ways. Some of them were barely alive and the dead had been piled up in a corner of the hut like trash.

Hound had been sent on this mission because of the power-enhancing drugs. The drug ring’s leader was a rogue shinobi who used the drugs to increase his chakra and the strength of his jutsu. Earth-based attacks. His main attack a unique jutsu that took minerals in his opponent’s body and turned them into shrapnel, ripping them apart from the inside out.

Some of the women had been torn apart by the jutsu, and so had some of the older villagers. He had treated them like toys to break and then dumped them to die miserable, long deaths when he was finished playing.

Hound had ripped through the thugs remorselessly. Using his blades and leaving not a single one alive. The leader had been more trouble but the Sharingan had been able to detect the jutsu and dodge it, copying it at the same time. It was a jutsu that Hound had turned upon its creator and watched as it began to rip him apart.

Hound was kinder than the drug lord however and he completed his mission with his own jutsu. Chidori was both cruel and swift.

Hound hadn’t stuck around once he was finished but retreated to the camp where the standard jounin and chunin were waiting. The mission had included medics and special jounin to care for the villagers who might have been injured and to remove all the drugs and unique plants.

He had left the jounin in charge with sufficient information and warned them of the bloodbath they were walking into. He probably didn’t have to worry about the last part as his uniform and skin was drenched in it.

Dismissed he had left as abruptly as he had arrived and run until the mountains were behind him.

Hound found a lake and checked for anyone else nearby. Sensing no one he finally removed his mask and vomited.

*  

Tears streamed down his face as the memories of the women he had found, the elders, the men and the single child who had been tortured floated into his mind. He hurled over and over as he recalled their twisted faces and desecrated bodies. He expelled all that was inside him as the stench of blood from the victims and those he had slaughtered consumed him.

His mask lay where he had dropped it and the Hound’s eyes stared up at him. Silently judging him.

He raised an arm, ready to wipe the saliva and vomit from his lips with the back of his hand but the sight of the crimson liquid drying on his skin made him freeze.

He threw himself towards the lake and stumbled over to it, moving like a possessed man. He crashed to his knees and plunged his hands into the clear water, blood billowing from his skin the second they entered.

He scrubbed and scrubbed at his hands, wrists, forearms.

“Need to get it off! Get it off! Get it off!!” He muttered frantically. He was so frenzied that he had failed to notice the eyes watching him from in the water.

A pair of hands grasped his wrists and he froze. They didn’t grasp him tightly, merely shackled
him in a light grip that he could easily break free from. He hadn’t noticed someone else nearby. He hadn’t seen them, hadn’t sensed them and couldn’t smell them (had the scent of blood become that strong?).

“You should be kinder to yourself Anbu-san.”

The voice was familiar, but he couldn’t remember where he had heard it. He should move away, this was a potential enemy, but his legs were locked. He just wanted to be clean.

The hands holding his wrists let go and he remained still, his arms plunged into the water. The hands returned and one lifted his left arm from the water, bringing a soap-laden cloth to his skin and gently rubbing his arm, wrist and hand. Over and over, one hand cradling his own the other dragging the cloth over his skin, lathering up the soap until bubbles coated his arm and wrist. The cloth disappeared and the hand scooped water up from the lake, dribbling it out of the cupped palm, washing away the bubbles.

The hands then focussed on his hand, repeating their actions, working the soap into a lather and clearing the blood away. They gently worked at his nails and nail beds. Those were the worst places, where the blood seemed to be embedded most. The water eventually cleared away the soap and it ran clear.

The hands placed his clean hand on a bare shoulder and turned to his right arm. He flinched. His right arm was worse. It was the one that sank into human bodies and turned them into corpses. The one with thousands of tiny scars because ripping through bone wasn’t easy.

The hands seemed to realise this and were even gentler as they handled his destructive arm. They repeated their actions from earlier, lathering up soap and rinsing it away until the water ran clear. When they moved onto his hand, they were so gentle but firm, taking care over every crevice of skin, every cut, every fingernail and the scarred back of his hand. The water ran clear and the hands placed his clean hand on another bare shoulder.

He could feel a pulse with his right thumb, his hands had been placed close to a neck. It wouldn’t take much effort to snap it. He didn’t think he could though.

The hands moved up and carefully poured water over his hair and face, soaking him. They rubbed a bar of soap in his vision, a thick lather building up before depositing the bar onto what he had finally realised was a floating piece of wood holding the cloth and the soap. The hands reached up to his head and sank into his wiry hair.

Strong fingertips sank deep and nails scraped smoothly over his head, working the soap right into his scalp and then coating strands of hair.

His eyes had been fixed the whole time on the lake surface below, rippling slightly as drops of water fell from his hair and plopped back into the lake. The hands worked all the way from the nape of his neck, where he actually had soft almost down-like hair, to his brow. Then the scooping of water began again, and one hand bracketed itself over and around his eyes, protecting them from soapy water.

Water poured down through his hair, stripping the soap away and those clever fingers massaged his scalp ensuring not a particle of soap or blood remained.

Then the hands went to work on his face. Only a little soap was used this time but it was massaged into his skin, carefully stroking the soap away from his eyes and when the hands came away with soap stained pink they were quickly doused in the lake, removing all trace of the morbid foam. The
water was poured down from the top of his head again, his bowed position making it impossible to get water on his face in any other way apart from splashing it upwards. And it took a long time to get all the soap off his face, but the hands were just as patient as they had been and soon the water ran clear.

It felt as if he hadn’t been breathing this whole time when the hands finally retreated, gently lifting his own from bare shoulders and holding them up beneath his eyes.

“Do you feel a bit cleaner now?” The voice came again.

He breathed in slowly and exhaled equally slow through his nose, a hissing sound that seemed almost too sharp and noisy for the calm that had enveloped him.

Kakashi stared at his hands. He couldn’t see any blood. Not in the crevices of his skin or under his nails nor trapped around the almost invisible hairs on his arm.

He finally looked up at the woman who had just spent an unknown amount of time washing him and recognised the woman from months ago.

Her face was passive. There was no judgement in her eyes, no thinning of her lips, no wrinkling of her nose. Only a calm acceptance and steady acknowledgement of him. She had seen him fall apart, seen him soaked in blood. And maybe she didn’t know everything (what the villagers called him, the legacy of his father, the gift from his teammate, the sacrifice of his teammates, the loss of his sensei, the loss of Naruto, the amount of times his hand had pierced flesh, muscle and bone), but she had seen him at his lowest and she hadn’t run away.

Maybe he wasn’t clean, even though he couldn’t see the blood or smell it at the moment, and maybe he would never be clean, but in that moment, kneeling by a lake, staring at a woman who had just washed blood from him and accepted him, Kakashi felt cleaner than he could remember feeling.

His throat worked wearily, raw and tense from his earlier episode of vomiting and the voice that came out sounded so tired that he almost didn’t recognise it as his own.

“Yes, I feel cleaner.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kakashi Part Three:
Kakashi gets some mothering. He meets Kitsune's motley group. He gets tucked into bed.
Kakashi - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Kakashi gets some mothering. He meets Kitsune's motley group. He gets tucked into bed.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kakashi

(Part Three)

* 

Realising the woman who had cleaned his hands was in fact naked in the lake, was so startling that Kakashi ended up falling in himself. He spluttered and pulled himself up from the depths, his eye determinedly looking upwards and not even glancing in the direction of the woman who was laughing full and loud.

He scrambled over to the bank and pulled himself out, wearily flopping onto his back once the majority of his body was clear of the water. His lower legs and feet remained in the cool water. He couldn’t summon the energy or the desire to move them. It was almost relaxing, lying on his back his feet chilling in the lake and his eye staring up at the clouds.

Kakashi heard the woman stifle her laughter and the sounds of her sinking under the water and rising again and again. He guessed he had interrupted her in the middle of bathing. He should probably apologise for that. He might like reading erotic novels but, unlike Jiraiya, he wasn’t an actual pervert and respected women and men’s rights to privacy.

Eventually, the woman left the lake and there was the rustling sound of fabric. Soft footsteps came towards him and then she was there, leaning over him and his eye widened. Crimson hair falling like a waterfall towards him, Kushina’s hair but shades closer to crimson. He recognised her face too. Kitsune, from his previous mission, a mere week ago. The woman who had nearly caused his mission to fail but then helped him escape without asking for anything in return.

He almost felt bad that he had, yet again, disturbed her but he hadn’t asked for her help and it had felt nice to be cared for.

“Are you feeling better now?”

He shrugged his shoulders. Her nose wrinkled and he watched impossibly her take in his drenched form. He was still a growing teenager and maybe he had skipped a few meals. Being on missions
almost back to back in the wake of the Kyuubi’s attack on the village meant there wasn’t a lot of
downtime and he hadn’t really cared to eat. Everything tasted like dirt and he knew that when he
got back to his flat there would be plates or bowls on the side and table with rotten food untouched
because he had made it and couldn’t bear to eat it.

“Can I help you up Anbu-san?” She reached down and held out her hand. The same hands that had
wiped the blood off. He reached up and noticed his arm and hand were trembling faintly.

She pulled as he twisted his body and removed his legs from the lake, staggering upwards until he
was slouched but vertical once more. Her hands went from his to holding up his shoulders and he
could have sworn he heard her tutting like a disapproving housewife.

“Let’s grab your mask and blade. I don’t suppose you’ll feel comfortable changing, so you’ll just
have to stay in those wet clothes. I’ll get you a blanket in a minute and then you can sit down and
have something to eat and if you can catch some shut eye. You’re in no state to try and go back to
Konoha.”

She muttered furiously under her breath. Kakashi thought he should probably be concerned when
the Hokage’s name came up in the same breath as ‘drop a beehive on him’ but he couldn’t find the
energy.

Kitsune had tucked herself under Kakashi’s shoulder, his arm wrapped around hers and she was
leading him along on weak legs. His Anbu mask had been tied to her waist and his blade re-
sheathed on his back.

His side where she was pressed against felt warm and her skin was soft and damp under his hand
on her shoulder. She wore only a breast band and hakama and he thought it would probably be
quite a cooling outfit. He himself had been sweating in the black, grey and silver Anbu uniform
under the hot sun.

She led him deeper into the trees, away from the lake and the vomit he had left behind. Noise
pricked his ears and he contemplated opening his Sharingan but the woman began chattering on.

“Hmm, I guess they’ve left the camp intact. Goodness knows the amount of times I’ve gone to
bathe and come back to an extinguished fire, burnt food although how one can burn it when
they’ve put the fire out I do not know, ripped clothing and bedrolls, at least one of them hiding up a
tree and on one particularly memorable occasion a wild boar rampaging through camp. It’s almost
like they have a talent for it. That or they’re wilful little kids who can’t follow instructions. I love
them dearly, but I do like to have a few moments peace without them to bathe. Not that I’m angry
at you for interrupting my bath sweetheart, but it is unusual that I get to bathe without interruption.
Maybe I should just set up a barrier every time I want to bathe but then the little scamps would
deconstruct it. I taught them too well.”

By the time she had finished her rambling (and Kakashi had picked up a lot of information from
that episode of word vomit) he half expected to walk into a camp filled with tiny children and an
odour of burnt meat. Instead they walked in to find an odd assortment of children, teenagers and
adults who were all doing an appalling job of pretending they weren’t looking at Kitsune and
Kakashi.

“Nope. I refuse to allow you to bring another one in.” A big blue man abruptly stood up and
Kakashi’s head tipped up and up as he looked at the big guy’s sharp teeth that now seemed to be
towering above him.

“You don’t get a vote Kisame.” A girl with long blonde hair snarled and ducked as the giant swung
at her with an open hand.

“There they go again.” Another teenager, a boy dressed in a kimono sighed and relaxed back against his bedroll, seemingly falling asleep instantly.

“Kisame, don’t make me set Nagato and Yahiko on you!” A woman with a pierced lip scowled and two men with piercings began leaning over her and protesting.

Three more males sat on a bedroll together, an albino, a silver-haired (not dissimilar to his own) and a third with orange hair. They dismissed the new arrivals and returned their attention to the snake cupped in their hands.

“Where are the others?” Kitsune asked.

“Kisame-nii said we didn’t have enough protein. Rōshi-ji-chan and Han-ji-chan went to fish in the stream and Oba-chan went to the snares and to gather herbs.” The snow-haired woman-man? announced.

“Thank you Kimimaro-kun. Kabuto put away your journal and then see to the medicinal herbs please. Jūgo please send the snake on its way and go with Nagato and Yahiko to wash up. Konan and Yugito please help Kisame with preparations for dinner. Kimimaro, see if you can wake up Utakata. He’ll have trouble sleeping tonight if he continues napping for much longer.”

Kakashi frowned as a slim woman with short dark hair tugged Kisame back down to his seat. She looked familiar. But his weary mind couldn’t slot the clues together. His knees trembled as Kitsune led him over to a bedroll by a tree and lowered him onto it.

She took pulled out a scroll and unsealed it, releasing a pile of neatly folded clothing.

“Here you go Wolf. You can take whatever you want or need. I’ll just hang this up here to give you some privacy.” Kitsune fussed around and draped a large sheet over a tree branch, obscuring him from the rest of the camp.

Kakashi could hear snickering.

“She’s given him a nickname.” He recognised the blonde girl’s voice.

“Maybe that’s his Anbu identity. It might not be a nickname.” Kisame argued back.

“You want to bet on that Kisame-nii?” Another teen spoke, his voice cracking and breaking with puberty.

“No.” Kisame sulked. “Shut up brats or I won’t feed you.”

“Kaa-chan wouldn’t let you starve us.”

“No, she wouldn’t.” Kitsune finished their loud teasing. “Now settle down and stop speculating about our guest.”

“What is his name Uzu? Or are we accepting any nameless mutt now?” Kisame grumbled.

“His name is his. We will refer to him as Wolf or Anbu-san.” Kakashi listened as Kitsune (Uzu, his mind supplied) scolded.

His hands brushed against the rich fabrics of the clothing Uzu had unsealed for him. Strong, tough shinobi garments but made of gentle and soft weaves and textures. He had never felt anything like
them.

He managed to peel off his damp clothing, laying it out over a low branch to dry, and gratefully slipped the new clothing onto his chilled body.

“Thank you.” He whispered and Uzu pulled back the sheet and made an approving noise.

“Much better. You may keep those items. They aren’t to any of my children’s tastes. They look well on you.”

Kakashi handed over the clothing that he didn’t use and Uzu sealed them away briskly and swiftly.

“Now, Wolf, you are going to lie down and rest. You are in no state to return to Konoha. You will rest and then you will eat and then you may rush off if you absolutely must.”

Kakashi feebly protested but his argument fell on unheeding ears. Uzu guided him to lay down, tucking a pillow beneath his head and then pulled the blanket up to his neck. It was such a foreign experience to Kakashi. The last time someone had tucked him into bed had been his father.

The familiar grief and anger and frustration swelled in him and whined like a wounded animal. He tried not to think of his father too often. Tried not to remember the man who had sacrificed and given to a village that vilified him. Tried not to remember how his father would come and get him from the playground, would walk him home in the sunset, would teach him how to work with his ninken, would carry him on his shoulders after training sessions, would cook his favourite dish of grilled eggplant, would tell him about his hauntingly beautiful mother who he only remembered fuzzy images of and the thud of her heart and her smell of wild dog roses and freshly mown grass.

Uzu’s hand petted his hair back, brushing the wiry strands over and over. A soothing, steady motion. Kakashi’s whimpers faded and he leant into the touch.

He hadn’t realised how much he craved human contact. His ninken did their best but they weren’t the same as a human hand. The only physical contact with humans Kakashi had at the moment were when he touched his marks, his targets and then ended them.

He missed Kushina-nee’s hand tugging him along exuberantly even though he was supposed to be guarding her. He missed Minato-sensei’s hair ruffles and steady hand on his shoulder. He missed his father’s forehead presses and embraces where Kakashi could hear the thud of his heart. He missed scuffling with Gai, his self-declared rival with his silly challenges that usually involved some glancing touches. He missed Anko throwing herself onto his back and crowing in victory. He missed Asuma gently nudging him in the side and throwing his arm over Kakashi’s shoulders. He missed Genma’s worried hands checking him after a spar or a mission. He missed Rin’s caring hands that had once bandaged and mended him. He missed Obito’s clumsy nature and the way he would buffet Kakashi as he meandered along.

But he had lost his precious people. Lost them or pushed them away.

Uzu’s hand kind, gentle, caring was only a reminder of what he had lost. But, for once, it didn’t hurt as much to remember.

Kakashi drifted off to sleep, his heart a tiny bit lighter as he dreamt of all his precious people.

*
Next Chapter - Kakashi Part Four:
Kakashi wakes to a puppy pile. He gets fed. His identity gets outed and then his two subordinates crash the party with some worrying news.
Kakashi woke and felt several bodies pressed against his. His first instinct was to bolt up and flee from the press of forms but Uzu’s calm voice soothed his frantic mind.

“Easy. You were having nightmares Wolf. The young ones decided you needed a puppy pile.”

Kakashi lifted his head from the pillow and saw that he had the youngest one splayed out on his chest. There was a patch on his new shirt that he presumed came from the drool trail trailing down the boy’s cheek.

There were males and females piled up all around and on him. Limbs brush carelessly and relaxed against his or draped across his body. He was feeling very warm and comfy and snuggly and safe.

Kakashi didn’t think he’d truly felt safe since before his mother passed. Since before his father stopped smiling as much.

Kakashi could smell cat too, and he turned his head to see a white cat peering at him with green eyes. He wrinkled his nose.

“Not a big fan of cats Wolf?” Uzu teased and lifted the cat away. She held the feline in her arms and began petting.

“Not particularly. More of a dog person.” Kakashi murmured. He didn’t really know what to do. He wanted to extricate himself from the human/child/teenager puppy pile he had found himself in but as he was currently the pillow or equivalent of a teddy bear at the moment he was uncertain how his escape would be accepted by the slumbering pile of humans.

Uzu snickered and then made a piercing whistle. The teenagers and young adults shot up
immediately. They all blinked sleepily and then pouted at Uzu.

“Time for dinner. And I’m certain Wolf was starting to lose feeling in his limbs.”

They all groused but clambered up (save for one of the teens in a sea-green kimono who
continued slumbering). Even the silver-haired boy who had been drooling on Kakashi’s chest
climbed off without embedding his knee in Kakashi’s stomach and went over to Uzu for a kiss on
the top of his head.

Kakashi stretched and stood, following after them. He remembered what Uzu had said and he
didn’t doubt she would insist on him eating before he returned to Konoha. He had to admit, he had
needed the rest. And if his stomach’s growling was any indication food was also a priority.

Although, the last full meal he could remember eating had tasted like nothing in his mouth. So,
eating to keep his body functioning and not for pleasure had become his default. But, the smell
wafting from the campfire did seem quite tantalising.

There was a spit over the fire now and turning on it were several rabbits, skinned and gutted and
crispy from their time over the flames. Fish on sticks embedded in the coals at the edge of the fire
pit were also wafting their scent to him. And there was a large wok embedded in the fire too with a
broth and noodles and vegetables simmering and bubbling away.

Kakashi licked his lips beneath his face mask. It actually smelt rather good.

“Hungry?” Uzu asked.

Kakashi nodded and then sat down where she indicated. The teens and adults who had been
sleeping in the puppy pile introduced themselves and Kakashi made not of them, their appearance,
their accent and any tells they had. Instinctively cataloguing and assessing them, making
judgements on their threat level.

There were older adults sat around the fire too and Kakashi’s eyes widened as one of them sat
upright from where she had been lounging on her side and partially obscured by the fire and the
spit.

“Tsunade-hime?” He breathed.

Tsunade blinked and narrowed her eyes, staring at him intently.

“Huh, the little Hatake brat.”

Uzu sighed. Kakashi’s back went ramrod straight as the teens who had been ignoring him, whilst
keeping an eye on the stranger in their midst, became blatant in their interest.

“Tsunade-chan. He’s an Anbu. I’m pretty sure you aren’t supposed to identify shinobi from your
own village. And definitely not oust them in a group of strangers.”

“Oops?” Tsunade offered with a nonchalant shrug. “Besides, you’ve already adopted the brat so we
would have learnt his name anyway. How’ve you been kid? Have you been giving your food to an
Akimichi? You’re far too skinny.”

Kakashi winced.

“I have been – well, Tsunade-hime.”
“Sure, and I’m not the Slug Sannin.” Tsunade scoffed. Uzu dropped the cat on Tsunade’s head and Kakashi watched as Tsunade-hime, the great healer, stuck her tongue out at Uzu like a child.

“I have been well Tsunade-hime. Truly. I’ve been taking a lot of missions recently.”

“A result of the Kyuubi attack?” Tsunade asked.

There was a tense atmosphere around the fire at her question and Kakashi saw several of the group exchanging glances.

“I do not think it appropriate to discuss Tsunade-hime. With all due respect. Hokage-sama would not like me discussing Konohas current status in front of unknown shinobi. Even if they are your – friends.”

Uzu laid a comforting hand on Kakashi, having walked back around the group to sit down beside him. He peered at her and saw no frustration or upset on her face.

“Let us eat.” She announced and the group spurred into action, handing out bowls and spoons and pulling fish from the fire whilst others used ladles to pour out the vegetable-noodle soup and some began carving and pulling the rabbits from the spit and dishing them out amongst the bowls held out eagerly.

“Please forgive Tsunade-chan.” Uzu said softly to Kakashi. “She means well.”

Kakashi nodded once and accepted a bowl full of vegetables, noodles and chunks of rabbit from Kimimaro.


Kakashi swallowed and ducked his head. It had been a long time since anyone said something favourable about his father.

“Leave Wolf alone to eat. Every pay attention to your own bowls and food. And Kabuto, I expect you to eat all your spring onions.”

“But Uzu-kaa-chan!” Kabuto protested. “They taste so foul.”

“Fine, half of them then.”

Kabuto pouted but shovelled in a large chopstick-ful of the green vegetable instantly. His nose wrinkled as he chewed and when he was finished he immediately began chomping on some rabbit.

Kakashi snuck bites from his own bowl and listened to the easy chatter of Uzu’s group. There were so many of them. They seemed an unusual group of individuals – personalities and temperaments that shouldn’t go well together from what Kakashi had observed thus far, yet they showed all the signs of being well-adjusted and devoted to each other.

He could see it in the way the oldest adults checked on the younger ones of the group, making sure they had enough to eat and doling out extra portions from their own bowls. The teens were jostling and shoving each other, sniping and snatching food from bowls but always reciprocating with some food item after each theft. He could see it in the way they listened to each other and laughed with each other.
“Family meals are not quiet affairs with my children I’m afraid Wolf.” Uzu murmured. Kakashi noticed the fond smile on her face.

“They aren’t all your children?”

“Yes and no. Biologically, no they have no relation to me. But they needed a mother or a sister and that is what I am.”

Kakashi could see that. She was the calm central point in the group. The one they turned to, to settle cheerful debates, the one they asked permission to dive into the pot and have seconds, the one who’s being the others orbited around and who’s attention made them thrive.

Kakashi was rather enjoying being a part of this family meal. Even if it was much noisier and more boisterous than he was used to.

* 

Not long after they had finished their meal Kakashi noticed a crow sitting on a tree branch, watching the group with a beady eye. He sniffed the air, the breeze blowing familiar scents towards him.

He imperceptibly readied himself to leave the group but before he could two Anbu landed nonchalantly in the clearing and Kakashi stiffened. It mostly definitely wasn’t protocol for operatives to enter unknown groups, even if their commander was currently in said group.

Before Kakashi could speak however, Yugito had launched herself at Weasel and the teen caught her around the waist.

“Nice to see you both again. Congratulations on making Anbu.” Uzu said with a wide smile. The rest of the family surged forward to speak to and welcome the Anbu and Kakashi was glad his mouth was concealed by his mask as it parted slightly in disbelief.

“So, what animals are your masks?” Kimimaro grinned wickedly and leaned in, peering at the other Anbu.

“Itachi-kun’s looks like a ferret? A stoat?” Jugo peered at the youngest of the two Uchiha.

Kakashi felt his uncovered eye widening in surprise. How did they know Itachi? Why didn’t he know about a group who knew his operatives? Itachi’s previous reports as a chunin and jōnin had never mentioned Uzu or her group. Definitely not. Nor had there been any mention of Yugito who was now standing next to Itachi and blushing.

“I am Weasel. Shisui is not so happy with his mask assignment.” Itachi lifted his mask off and fastened it to his waist and snickered.

Kakashi didn’t even know the boy could smile, but there was a definite curve to his lips. And there was a snicker. Small, soft and almost inaudible but present, nonetheless.

Shisui groaned and pulled his own mask off and attached it to his waist too. Kimimaro and Utakata wrapped their arms around Shisui, tugging him about in a bout of rough play. The others joined in with Shisui using his Body Flicker to escape them.

Han, the quiet giant of a man, began giggling. It was a disconcerting sight and sound for the large man to be making. High nasal giggles.
“You’re – you’re – you’re Squirrel. Aren’t you?”

Shisui groaned again and let himself be captured and Utakata promptly squeezed his cheeks.

“Kaa-chan was right in naming you Squirrel! With your round cheeks and squirrelly attitude. It fits you perfectly and now your Hokage has acknowledged your squirrel attributes too!”

“Squirrels are demons!” Shisui hissed.

Uzu stepped forward and brushed the back of her fingers across Shisui’s slightly reddened cheeks. Shisui settled and grinned resignedly at Uzu.

“So, I really am a squirrel Uzu-sama. You called it.”

Uzu raised an eyebrow and smirked.

Kakashi coughed and stepped forward. “Whilst I am greatly intrigued as to how you all know each other; I assume we have a mission. Report Squirrel, Weasel.”

Both straightened up, their tomfoolery and relaxed state falling off swiftly and returning to the Anbu they were.

“Hokage-sama has given us a reconnaissance mission Taichou. There are reports of disturbance in Takigakure and the Land of Deltas. We are to investigate the reports of a mass attack on the nation. Hokage-sama wishes to know if this could lead to further invasions with other nations or conflict with Hi no Kuni.” Shisui rattled off.

Uzu had stilled and when Shisui finished she turned to the rest of her family and gave a signal. They all immediately began packing up, breaking camp faster than Kakashi could have thought a group this size could.

“Uzu-sama?” Itachi asked tentatively. “Is there something wrong?”

“I am going to Takigakure. Chōmei is there. And I haven’t sensed her properly in days.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Shisui Part Four:
Uzu, the family and Kakashi’s Anbu team arrive in Takigakure. The devestation is immense. Uzu leads Shisui to a sacred space. There's a baby and a scared little boy.
Chapter Summary

Uzu, the family and Kakashi's Anbu team arrive in Takigakure. The devastation is immense. Uzu leads Shisui to a sacred space. There's a baby and a scared little boy.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment!

Content Warning: Massacre, destruction, slaughter, burning of a village

Shisui

(Part Four)

*

Shisui could tell Kakashi-taichou was not best pleased that they had been overrun by Uzu’s family. But he didn’t bother trying to persuade Kakashi that it was actually beneficial to have Uzu-sama with them.

From what he had gleaned from Kimimaro and Utakata whilst they ran, Uzu had only just brought Kakashi into the group. He had yet to learn of the Bijuu and Jinchūriki in their midst.

Shisui also noticed that all the Jinchūriki seemed distracted on occasion. Their journey was hard and fast. Every now and again the Jinchūriki would flinch, wince, grow angry and then calm again.

Shisui could only assume that they were communicating with their Bijuu. He couldn’t imagine how the Bijuu might be feeling at the possibility of one of their siblings being endangered. Especially as they had only just freed another from a genjutsu.

And wasn’t that a kicker? The Mizukage being controlled by a genjutsu. Tsunade and Shizune had related the events of their time in Mizu in hushed whispers to Itachi and Shisui. Shisui couldn’t help but agree that a Sharingan could control a Bijuu. He had read the stone tablet below the shrine.

Worse, Konoha somehow knew the same. There were whispers flooding the streets that the Kyuubi attack, had been orchestrated by the Uchiha. Shisui and Itachi didn’t know how the village had found out. But suddenly everyone was well informed of Madara’s control of Kyuubi decades ago. The whispers were spreading like wildfire and the Uchiha were under scrutiny.

Shisui did not like the situation at all.

*
Takigakure was burning. It seemed so odd that a village comprised of waterfalls could burn. But there was no doubt that it was aflame. The burning was immense and the only safe path into the village was via the streams that were slowly being heated up by the intense firestorm building.

Uzu had left the younger ones outside the waterfall that hid the village entrance. Shizune guarding them. Yugito and Utakata had protested fiercely but a whispered conversation with Uzu had calmed them somewhat.

The sight of the village aflame was heart-wrenching, and all of them had lived through war and seen death and destruction first-hand. But this was different. This was wanton, greedy destruction. Buildings, homes razed to the ground and bodies of the villagers lay like dolls on the ground.

Shisui’s Sharingan recorded it all. Every burning tree, bush and home. Every single twisted face and wound. The hands grasping onto each other even in death.

“Could anyone survive this?” Shisui murmured.

At his side Itachi knelt and placed a teddy bear back in a child’s hand. Kakashi was directing his summoned ninken to search for any survivors.

“We must check.” Tsunade said. “If even one person lives…”

They scattered at Uzu’s nod, Rōshi and Han accompanying Tsunade to search the east side, Kakashi and Itachi to the west. Shisui joined Uzu and they headed north. There was no point searching the south of the village, the entrance lay to the south and they had found no survivors on their journey in.

Shisui’s Sharingan saw no chakra, no indication that anyone had survived.

“We keep going.” Uzu commanded and Shisui flickered next to her.

Her face was flat and drawn. Pale and speckled with specks of soot. In the light of the flames burning around them her hair glowed. She looked otherworldly, foreign, distant, remote. Shisui licked his dry lips.

He could understand how some shinobi had believed her to be unearthly. The nickname Kishi Bojin – a goddess or a demon. In this moment, he wasn’t sure which she was. Fear trickled down his spine. It was instinctive. A reflex to being confronted with a greater strength than his.

“Lead on Uzu-sama.”

Shisui kept looking around as they ran but still nothing.

“Wait, there’s something up ahead. I can’t – it’s – impossible. There’s a tree. A tree, larger than any I’ve ever seen. And it’s full of chakra!”

“We go to the tree. Ninken-san, could you alert the others to join us at the tree once they have finished their search?” Uzu said respectfully to the elegant greyhound that had accompanied them thus far.

The hound barked and raced back along the stream.

“What is this tree?” Shisui asked.

“It is the Hero Tree. An imitation of the original God Tree. It has been guarded by the shinobi of
Takigakure long before villages were even created.” Uzu said as they ran.

“Why? What’s so special about this tree?”

They skidded to a stop and Shisui tilted his head back to gaze far up at the branches that were impossibly far away. The tree was isolated on an island in the centre of the vast lake that fed the streams of Takigakure. The inferno could not cross the water, but Shisui could see embers floating on the breezes generated by the waterfalls crashing down and feeding the lake.

Soon, too soon, the embers would reach the leaves and branches. Then, it would only be a matter of time before this majestic tree burnt too.

“This tree produces a special substance. The humans call it the Hero Water. A few sips and your chakra is increased beyond Kage levels. But it drains your life. Too much and you could die within minutes of drinking it.”

“There’s always a price to power.” Shisui muttered. The Uchiha were cursed to lose their vision, slowly and painfully as they used their Sharingan. There was always a price.

“Indeed. Follow.” Uzu led him into the behemoth knots and twists of roots and a tunnel-like structure began to appear around them, made naturally out of the tree’s roots.

“How do you know where you’re going?” Shisui whispered. It didn’t feel right to talk loudly here. This was sacred ground.

“I can feel Chōmei. I can sense her. She’s deep in the tree.”

The tunnel opened out onto a clearing beneath the trunk of the tree. A shrine surrounded almost entirely by a moat-like barrier of water. Twisted roots burst from the surface forming a bridge of sorts and Shisui followed Uzu’s confident steps.

She was relentless, going faster and unerringly treading into the shrine. Shisui hovered at the entrance for a moment. He didn’t know if it was right for him to tread within.

Uzu didn’t wait and Shisui cursed before following after. He knew Uzu could handle herself but he wouldn’t just let her go on alone. Especially when they had no idea what state Chōmei or her Jinchūriki were in.

* 

The shrine was carved out of the tree. Human hands and blades and tools had chipped away the wood, carved it from the very much alive tree.

Shisui could see the chip marks from chisels and the elegant carvings that must have taken hours, weeks and years to form. The shrine was a masterpiece. A masterpiece that bore the scars of recent battle.

There were cracks in the wood, scorch marks and cuts. Kunai and senbon scattered on the floor or embedded into the walls. Blood drips on the floor, dry and dark. The smell of burnt flesh and blood mingled bitterly with the natural scent of the tree itself.

“How much further?” Shisui murmured.

“We keep going.”
“We should wait for the others.”

“No time.”

Shisui pulled a piece of chalk from his weapons pouch and marked the walls and corners as Uzu led him deeper and up into the shrine. They were now within the trunk of the tree and climbing higher and higher.

“Is this where they keep the Hero Water?”

Uzu nodded her head and paused for a moment on the stairs. Her hand was trembling as she held aloft a burning torch that they had swiped from a bracket in the shrine.

“Is that why Taki was invaded? For the Hero Water?”

“I do not know. Once I’ve found Chōmei we can check and see if the Hero Water is still there. It takes decades for the tree to produce it, and it only makes a small amount, so it is carefully stored and guarded.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Shisui licked his lips and left another chalk marking for Kakashi-taichou and Itachi.

“Not much further. I can feel Chōmei’s chakra is close.”

Uzu surged forward and Shisui kept pace with her.

They finally reached a platform high within the tree itself that led out onto a large, flat branch. There was a small hollow to the side of the doorway and Uzu paused.

Shisui hissed in a breath. There was a corpse on the branch. A man, a shinobi. His headband bore the Taki symbol.

He knelt next to the man and looked over his body. There were small cuts, scrapes and gashes. But there was no visible cause of death.

“Uzu-sama…”

She glanced over her shoulder. “Notice the drawn in skin? The wrinkles and stress lines? The bulging veins? He used the Hero Water. Too much of it. But he was defending something precious.”

Shisui closed the shinobi’s eyes and murmured a quick prayer. He trotted back over to Uzu.

“What was he protecting?”

“The thing he hid within the tree. I need to ask it to open.”

“Ask the tree to open?” Shisui queried. Uzu nodded and laid her hands either side of the raised hollow. There was moss and lichen on the platform and a space that was bare of greenery. Shisui supposed that was where the container for the Hero Water had sat once.

“What do you need me to do Uzu-sama?”

“Get ready to catch.”

Shisui frowned. “Catch what?”
Uzu didn’t answer but closed her eyes and poured golden energy into her hands. Her energy sank into the bark and Shisui felt his mouth drop open in awe as the bark was illuminated with a network of veins and channels.

He could see the internal structure of the tree. He could see that it had a network and the network was alive. As Uzu poured more energy into the tree the back of the hollow began to crack, the bark peeling back and curling away from a central jagged opening that was widening each second.

Shisui held his breath as the hollow opened up as if Uzu had used a key to reveal a hidden space.

A boy surged from the hollow with something held tightly in his arms. Shisui yelped and caught him, wrapping his arms around the boy’s waist and preventing him from going toppling over the branch to the lake far below.

“Easy, kid! Take it easy!” He yelped as the boy wriggled and howled in his hold. “Stop! You’ll fall!”

“Chichiue!” The boy screamed. Shisui felt his face fall.

Uzu had prised her hands from the tree, panting in exertion. She padded around Shisui to kneel in front of the wriggling boy. Her hand flashed out and caught the child’s chin. Her grip was firm but gentle and the boy steadied.

“I’m sorry. Your chichiue is gone.”

“I know.” The boy sobbed. “I heard him fighting them. They wanted her. But Chichiue hid me with her in the tree. He said he would let me out when they were gone.”

Uzu’s mouth turned up in a sympathetic smile.

“You’ve done so well. You’ve been so brave and strong, looking after her. But you both need to drink and she needs it especially. Will you let me take her?”

The boy bit his lower lip and stared at Uzu. Shisui released the boy and sank into a crouch behind him.

Slowly, painfully slowly, the boy held out the bundle in his arms. Uzu carefully accepted it, arranging it in her arms. The hold was familiar to Shisui. He had seen Mikoto-oba-chan holding Sasuke similarly only a few days ago.

Uzu pulled the blanket down and tucked it beneath a chubby chin. A green-haired baby wailed, sharp, shrill and plaintive.

Shisui swallowed.

“Is that – Chōmei?”

“Yes. This is Chōmei’s Jinchūriki.”

*
Translation:
Chichiue – more traditional/formal version of father.

Next Chapter - Shibuki & Fu:
We find out how Shibuki felt hiding in the tree. Shibuki is comforted by Uzu. Shisui holds Fu (and he's falling a little bit in love with her adorableness). Shisui bestows a nickname. Fu likes the boy holding her. A lot.
Chapter Summary

We find out how Shibuki felt hiding in the tree. Shibuki is comforted by Uzu. Shisui holds Fu (and he's falling a little bit in love with her adorableness). Shisui bestows a nickname. Fu likes the boy holding her. A lot.

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always for every single bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

ITAV reached a milestone today with 550+ kudos so, you know the drill by now if you're a long term reader, you get two chapters today!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shibuki & Fū

*

Chichiue hadn’t come back. Shibuki rocked the sleeping Fū in his arms. He didn’t know how long they had been hidden in the tree, but it felt like a very, very long time. Fū had been crying and he didn’t know how to make her stop but eventually she had stopped on her own.

Shibuki wondered if she was hungry. He was hungry. His stomach was pinching him. But he couldn’t leave the tree. Chōmei told him he had to stay. He had to stay hiding from the people in the cloaks, the shinobi with the slashed headbands and the scary masked monsters.

The tree was warm, just like it always was. But Shibuki wasn’t enjoying being with it anymore. He was finding the tight space was too small. Chōmei kept making him sleep but whenever he was awake, he drank sap from the tree and felt like his chest was too tight and there was a weight pressing down on him.

He buried his nose in Fū’s downy baby hair. Her green hair was silky and smooth and smelt of flowers and soot. Shibuki wondered if his hair smelt like fire too.

The tree began to shift. The entrance to their hollow was opening, slowly peeling back and air rushed into the hollow.

*

Chichiue’s body was stiff. And cold. Shibuki didn’t know how long he had hidden in the Hero Tree whilst his Chichiue lay alone.

For a moment, a brief moment, Shibuki hated Chōmei for keeping him asleep and hidden. But then, it passed, and the sorrow overwhelmed him once more. He fist ed his hands in his Chichiue’s sleeve and sobbed.
“Little Warrior…” The woman was crouched next to him. Shibuki lifted his head to stare at her soot-smeared face. She looked kind. Not like the shinobi that had attacked their village.

“I don’t want to leave him.” Shibuki’s lower lip trembled.

“I know. But he’s gone. His soul, his spirit has passed on. The husk left behind no longer contains your Chichiue.”

More tears spilled silently over his cheeks. He could feel snot dripping from his nose too. The woman reached out with a handkerchief to wipe at his runny nose and cheeks. Her hands were gentle and the fabric soft against his tender nose.

“So we have to go?” Shibuki whispered.

“I’m afraid we do little Warrior.” The woman murmured. “Your village – is gone. It is burning and we must leave, or we too will burn.”

“Uzu-sama… Do you want me to carry the boy?” The man cradling Fū and bouncing her gently against his chest asked.

“No, thank you Shisui-kun. If you would continue to care for –“

“Fū. Her name’s Fū. And Chōmei is inside her. Chōmei won’t go away. Fū’s had her armour for days now.”

“Thank you. Shisui-kun will carry Fū-chan down. And what’s your name Little Warrior?”

“Shibuki.”

Uzu-sama smiled.

“So, you are a splash? I’m a whirlpool or eddy myself.”

Shibuki smiled weakly before remembering his Chichiue.

“I don’t want to leave Chichiue. Even if he isn’t inside himself anymore.”

Uzu-same reached out and stroked Shibuki’s cheek with the backs of her fingers.

“The Hero Tree is going to burn too. Your Chichiue will burn with it. His body and the tree returning to dust. He will protect it in death, just as he protected you, Fū, Chōmei and the tree in life.”

Shibuki wiped his once again runny nose on the back of his hand. He looked at his Chichiue, for the last time.

“Love you Chichiue.” He whispered.

One trembling breath later and Shibuki straightened out his Chichiue’s sleeve, smoothing the fabric of his coat down once more. He stood and stared down and out across his village, seeing the towering plumes of smoke ascending high and the glow of the flames. Embers dancing in the breeze like the fireflies Fū liked to watch at night.

“I’m ready, Uzu-sama.”

Uzu-sama smiled and bent down, scooping him up and onto her back. He clung on tightly, his
hands locked around her neck and his legs clamped onto her sides. The fabrics beneath his skin felt luxurious and clean despite the dirt and dust and smut in the air.

“Do you have Fū and Chōmei, Shisui-kun?” Uzu’s voice rumbled through her body, vibrating against Shibuki’s chest. It didn’t rumble as much as Chichiue’s did. But Shibuki sort of liked it anyway.

A pang pierced his chest and a whimper ripped from his lips. He’d never get a piggy-back ride from his Chichiue ever again. Another sob welled up in him and he pressed his face into Uzu-sama’s hair. Burying his tears and cries in the wealth of crimson strands.

“We’re good Uzu-sama. Do you want me to take lead on the way down?”

“That would be helpful, thank you. If you need to shunshin out of the Hero Tree. Little Warrior and I will be fine.”

Shibuki kept his face pressed into Uzu’s hair as she trotted down the many stairs that led down to the shrine. He didn’t want to see his home destroyed. He didn’t want to see the bodies of people he had known all his life. He didn’t want to see his home burning and the shop and the school and his neighbour’s house turning to ash and dust.

*

They burst out from the waterfall concealing the entrance to Takigakure and into bright sunlight. Shibuki didn’t understand how it could be so sunny when his Chichiue was gone. But the sun was there, bright and warm on his head and back. A breeze teasing his hair and whisking away the scent of smoke and burning.

He heard more people arriving and could sense their stares. He lifted his head partially from Uzu-sama’s hair to peer at the new people with one red-rimmed eye. A lady with hair the same colour as the wheat held out her hands coated in green light over Fū.

Shibuki whined and lunged off Uzu-sama’s back, trying to get to Fū and Shisui who was still cradling the infant girl.

“Leave her alone! She’s not a monster!” He yelled.

Uzu-sama was forced to let go of his legs from the force of his tugging and for a brief moment Shibuki panicked as he free fell towards the ground. A pair of large hands caught him and lifted him up and up and up, higher than Uzu-sama and higher than Chichiue.

“Careful little lordling.”

Shibuki stared at the giant garbed in red armour.

“Tsunade-sama is just checking Fū-chan and Chōmei are not unwell. It is rare for a Bijuu to manifest when their Jinchūriki is just a baby.”

“What does man-i-fest mean?” Shibuki asked. He kept his attention diverted between the lady (Tsunade-sama) and the giant who used the big words.

“Appear, show, display, exhibit. Chōmei’s scales are appearing on Fū, as are her wings. Tsunade-sama and Uzu-sama want to ensure that Chōmei’s chakra isn’t harming Fū.”

Shibuki wrinkled his nose thoughtfully. The giant spoke so formally.
"Chōmei doesn’t hurt Fū-chan. The ladies used to do that but then Chōmei made them stop. But the other villagers were afraid because Fū-chan looked different and could fly."

The giant bristled and the small man with the red nose and cheeks and hair began to grumble. Shibuki peered down at the man from his perch in the giant’s arms.

“Are you all afraid of Fū-chan too? It isn’t her fault, and it’s not Chōmei’s either. Chichiue says that Fū-chan is keeping us all safe and that Chōmei is helping us.”

The giant chuckled and shook his head. Shibuki wondered what his face looked like underneath the cloth covering his nose and mouth. He had seen another man with a covered face. And the small angry man (who was still muttering) had a beard covering his chin and cheeks and a Funky metal strip over his nose too.

These were strange people.

“We are not afraid of Fū-chan.” The angry man grumbled. “We’re like Fū-chan too. Well, Han and I are anyway.”

Shibuki’s mouth dropped open.

“You have Tailed Beasts in you too?”

“We do.” Said Han.

“I’ve got the Yonbi, Son Goku. Han has Gobi, Kokuō. There are two more outside as well. Fū-chan will never make us afraid.”

Shibuki smiled tremulously. “That’s good… But are you going to take Fū-chan away from me? Will I be all on my own? ‘Cause Chichiue said I’m supposed to protect Fū-chan, but if you want her and you won’t be afraid of her then she won’t need me anymore. And I’ll be alone because Fū-chan and Chōmei will be gone and Chichiue’s d-d-dead.”

Han looked mighty concerned and uncertain as Shibuki began wailing loudly. He swiftly passed Shibuki back down to Uzu who cradled him against her. His legs once again tightened around her hips and he sobbed and left snot on her shoulder.

“You can both come with us Shibuki-kun. Unless there is somewhere else you’d rather go? Do you have any relatives outside of Taki you want to go live with?” Uzu crooned and stroked his hair.

He shook his head.

“It was just me, an’ Chichiue, an’ Fū-chan an’ Ch-Chōmei.”

“Then you are one of us now.”

Shibuki sobbed. He sobbed because his Chichiue was gone and his friends were gone, and his village was disappearing.

Uzu rocked him in her arms and Shibuki cried and cried until he fell asleep. His dreams were dark and dim and quiet. He was glad he didn’t dream of the horrible things he had seen and heard and smelled. But he wished he would wake and find that everything had been a dream and that Chichiue was making breakfast and feeding Fū-chan.

*
Fū could feel Shi crying. She didn’t like it. It felt odd being pressed against his chest when he was making so much noise. She asked Cho-Cho what to do but Cho-Cho didn’t have an answer.

Then Fū was distracted as someone else took her from Shi. She wriggled and whined in the blankets, trying to free her hands and feet.

“Easy little Firefly. You’re alright. You’re fine.” There was a new person crooning at her. His eyes were pretty, like a ladybird.

Fū giggled and reached up, the man having freed her hand from the blanket. She stuffed her hand in his mouth and tugged on his lip.

She could feel and see his smile. It made her giggle.

“What a funny little Firefly you are.” The man said.

Fū liked the man. He had a nice smile. And he was warm, so very warm and comfy. Nearly as warm and good-feeling as the lady holding Shi.

Fū wondered when she would get a hug from the nice lady.

Cho-Cho laughed in her head. It was a sad laugh.

*I think I would quite like a hug too.*

*Chapter End Notes*

**Fun Fact:**

Shisui is a total sucker and he is now Fū’s. He isn’t Fū’s boyfriend or anything (because she’s only about 2 years old). He’s just hers. The end (and it’s totally mutual).

Next chapter - Fu & Chomei will be posted shortly!
Fu & Chomei

Chapter Summary

In which we learn a bit about Fu (and Chomei's) past. Shisui is falling in love with his little Firefly. Chomei speaks to her mother.

Chapter Notes

Double update tonight! Make sure you've read Shibuki & Fu before reading this chapter or you might be confused!

Remind me not to write babies ever again... Trying to get into baby mindspace (whilst acknowledging that aforementioned baby isn't 'typical' because she's a Jinchuriki and has an ancient chakra being living inside her) was hellish... Also Fu had a tendency to just devolve into a constant stream of thoughts and feelings which took me hours to edit. I don't spend as much time editing as I probably should but Fu's mind needed it. I don't even like babies that much.... this was torture. Do not expect another Fu chapter until she's old enough to speak properly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fū & Chomei

*

Fū had never been alone. Never, not once in her short life. Even from the moment of her conception. Not that she knew that. But she did know that as long as she could remember there had been someone with her.

Cho-Cho. Cho-Cho had been with her when she was growing and becoming and being made. Cho-cho with her pretty voice and her sparkly wings and the brilliant images she shared with the newly forming Fū.

Cho-Cho had known Fū before Fū was even called Fū. Cho-Cho showed Fū what her okaa-chan looked like because Cho-Cho had seen her reflection. Fū thought her okaa-chan was beautiful. With nutbrown skin and pale blonde hair and big eyes. Fū also though all the butterflies that fed off the flowers her okaa-chan planted were beautiful. Cho-Cho shared so many things with Fū.

When Fū was born, she still wasn’t alone. She was with her okaa-chan, being held for the first time. Fū spent all her time with okaa-chan. But then okaa-chan went away and she stayed in new place and she slept in a room with a boy who liked to lean over her crib and make funny faces and tickle her tummy.

Then Cho-Cho was back but this time she was inside Fū and not okaa-chan. Cho-Cho’s voice and warmth was stronger now. Stronger than when Fū had been in okaa-chan.
Fu never felt okaa-chan again. Cho-Cho explained it through images, fuzzy memories of okaa-chan out on a trip. Of okaa-chan being injured and falling into a river. Of okaa-chan floating along until she reached home once more. But okaa-chan was almost gone. She’d asked for Cho-Cho to be put inside Fu.

Fu was sad that okaa-chan was gone. Especially as Cho-Cho said that okaa-chan wouldn’t come back ever and that Fu would have to wait to see her again. But she was happy to be with Cho-Cho again.

Fu lived with the boy who liked to lean over her crib and would take her out to lie on a blanket and see all the pretty flowers and insects. Fu liked the bees that would land on her nose. They were all fuzzy and furry and tickled her skin. Cho-Cho taught her how to be careful with the insects so that they wouldn’t get frightened and so she wouldn’t accidentally squish them.

Shi, the boy who played with Fu, didn’t like the insects much. They made him squeal and his face wrinkle up. That made Fu giggle.

Shi’s Chichue was quiet and solemn. Cho-Cho said he was very important, like the queen bee or ant. That he had to look after Shi and Fu and lots of other humans. That he was the one in charge. But sometimes when Fu smiled he would smile back.

Fu liked Shi and Ji and Cho-Cho. They were nice to her. Not like the ladies who came to look after her when Shi and Ji went away. The ladies would always squeeze her too hard when they lifted her out of her crib. And they wouldn’t play with her either, no matter how much she cried.

Fu stopped crying after a while. She learnt that it didn’t matter how long or loud she cried. They still wouldn’t pay attention to her except for feeding her and taking her clothing off and wiping her with cool water.

Cho-Cho said they were frightened. Fu didn’t understand what frightened was. Then she learnt when one of the ladies shook her hard and shouted at her. Fu’s head rattled around, and her little body shook. She screamed louder than she had ever done before.

Cho-cho’s sparkling wings burst from her back and her armour slid out from beneath Fu’s skin. Fu/Cho-cho hovered high in the air, their wings fluttering and keeping them out of reach. Her armoured skin was shiny and sparkly, and dust fell from her wings.

The scary lady screamed as loud as Fu/Cho-Cho and then Ji came in and saw what was going on. The lady never came back. And Fu didn’t have to stay in the house after that. Ji took her with him when he left home. He would carry her around strapped to his chest.

Fu liked the village. There were lots of interesting things in it. Lots of bugs that told her about the best flowers too. And the bugs made up for the people who would talk to Ji nicely but then give Fu nasty stares. Fu didn’t know what nasty stares were for or why she would get them, but Cho-Cho said they weren’t very good.

Fu was happy with her life. She was fed and warm and clean. She had Cho-Cho with her always, Shi when he wasn’t busy and Ji too. She had all the bugs that lived in the bark of the trees, in the hollows of the ground and fed off plants and fruit and other things.

But then everything changed. Fu was frightened. Cho-Cho was worried too. Cho-Cho made the armour come again and Fu hid in the blanket Ji wrapped her up in.

Then Shi was cradling her and whispering to her and begging her to be quiet. Fu could smell
something that stung her nose and hear loud noises that made her head ache. Cho-Cho told her that there were bad people. Bad people who wanted them.

Fū stayed very quiet. Because Cho-Cho and Shi asked her to.

*

Chōmei was greatly relieved when she sensed Mother. She could feel her, drawing nearer and nearer.

The invaders had long gone but Chōmei hadn’t spoken to Shibuki. She didn’t want him to try and leave the hollow. She had heard his father fall. Had heard the invaders jeering and mocking him before they left. She had heard the screams of the villagers and the dying breaths of the shinobi who had given them time to reach the hollow.

Chōmei knew Mother was coming. She just had to keep Shibuki and Fū safe inside the tree.

Her scale dust was easy to disperse into the air by forming wings on Fū’s back and gently flapping them within the blanket. The dust seeped into the air of the hollow and both younglings fell asleep.

Chōmei kept watch. She didn’t want to, but if she absolutely had to, she would transform and take on Bijuu Mode. It wouldn’t be great for Fū, it could stunt her growth, but if it kept Fū and Shibuki alive Chōmei would do it.

She could sense Mother drawing nearer. It took a couple of days. But days were nothing to a Bijuu. Mere blinks of an eye when you were as old as Chōmei was. Shibuki and Fū partially woke every few hours and Chōmei spoke up to encourage Shibuki to drink the sap of the tree.

The sap was full of nutrients and vitamins and was thick like goats’ milk. Luckily, unlike the Hero Water, it had no bad side effects. It wasn’t as good as real milk or food, but it was better than nothing and Fū needed to keep receiving nutrients and so did Shibuki.

When Mother poured her energy into the tree and encouraged the hollow to open Chōmei could have burst out of the blanket with joy. But Shibuki was worried and she didn’t want to upset him further. Especially not once he found out his Chichiue was gone.

*

The sunlight and mist from the waterfall felt heavenly on Chōmei/Fu’s armour. Chōmei/Fu wriggled around until the blanket was unwrapped and Shisui was forced to pull it free from their tangled legs and grab them around the waist.

Fu/Chōmei giggled and unfurled their wings flapping them in the light and listening to the buzz they made as they moved too quickly to be seen.

“Woah!” Shisui breathed. “Was not expecting wings too!”

Chōmei preened mentally. Her wings were impressive. The only Bijuu capable of flight (true flight because being able to jump great distances didn’t count Kokuō).

“Umm, Uzu-sama?” Shisui asked nervously and glanced as the one he called Itachi frowned worriedly at his side.

Mother came over and Chōmei/Fu’s wings beat even quicker.
“Ah, I see. Han, would you mind carrying Shibuki-kun for a bit? He’s fast asleep now.”

Han accepted the limp boy and with a saddened Tsunade’s help arranged the boy till he was comfortably supported against Han’s chest.

Mother turned her attention to Chōmei/Fu and held out her hands in a beckoning gesture. There was still a few feet between her and Shisui’s positions.

“Come here Chōmei.”

“You want him to let go of a baby?” Rōshi said. “What if she falls?”

Mother rolled her eyes.

“Chōmei’s been flying for eons. She won’t let Fu fall. Besides, Shisui-kun’s fast enough to catch her if she were to be unable to fly this short distance. Aren’t you Shisui-kun?”

Shisui gulped and stared at Chōmei/Fu as if they were about to explode. Chōmei/Fu wriggled and whined and strained towards Mother. The teen let go and there was an inhalation from many of the watching shinobi when for a split second Chōmei/Fu dipped in the air before hurtling into Mother’s arms.

“Mother!” Chōmei buzzed.

“I have missed you Chōmei.”

“I missed you too. It’s been so long. And I see you have already found Kokuō and Son Goku! I can feel them. And I felt you too Mother. I knew you were coming so I kept Fu-chan and Shibuki-kun safe!”

“You did very well Chōmei. Kept them both safe.”

“I have to go soon. It is bad for Fu-chan if I’m present for too long. And I’ve been present for days now. It has also drained my chakra. But, I will see you again soon?”

“Soon indeed.”

Itachi coughed. “Is it not bad for a baby to be enduring such a great amount of chakra? Fu-chan’s chakra network hasn’t developed yet. If Chōmei-san presents again soon, it could be detrimental to Fu-chan’s growth.”

Mother chuckled and shook her head.

“In human terms of soon, yes. But Chōmei’s soon and my soon are not the same as yours. Chōmei can wait a few years until Fu-chan’s chakra network has developed. Her soon can be considered years, after all, she is already eons old. Time passes differently when you are immortal and deathless.”

“Mother is correct. I will not present in Fu-chan again until she is grown. I know Mother and my siblings will keep her safe. If absolutely necessary I will manifest, but I trust Mother.” Chōmei said wearily.

“We will keep her, and you, safe.” Rōshi grumbled.

“Thank you. Fu-chan has already lost so much. She deserves to grow up strong and happy and healthy. Thank you Mother, and my siblings. I look forward to the time when we can speak again.”
Chōmei pulled her chakra back from Fu and sank wearily back into the prison within Fu. Her wings flattened down against her back and she tucked her legs underneath her to sink down to the floor of the waterfall cave that was her cage.

A long sleep was in order. And Chōmei could sleep easily knowing that she, and her Jinchūriki, were safe. Safe for the first time in over fifty years (since she was captured and became a captive of shinobi). Chōmei closed her eyes and slept, her dreams filled with potential futures and Fu-chan’s feelings.

Soon would happen in the blink of a Bijuu’s eye. And Chōmei was patient. She could wait.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact:
Chōmei was never officially affiliated with any of the 5 Great Nations. When Hashirama collected up the Bijuu and used them to barter ‘peace’ between the other nations Chōmei was not one of the Bijuu officially dished out.

Usu-verse headcanon is that Chōmei was the last of the Bijuu to be caught (after all she can literally fly away). I like to think that Takigakure were able to capture her – because they are noted to have highly skilled jōnin – and maybe used the Hero Water to do so as well before sealing her away. I also like to think that Chōmei was almost relieved as she had been flying and hiding for decades from humans. Maybe she even let herself be captured by Takigakure because they didn’t need her because they already had the Hero Water.

Next Chapter - Kakashi Part Five:
Kakashi is not a happy bunny (wolf?). Shisui and Itachi are in the dog house. Kakashi’s grief is (finally!) addressed somewhat. Mama Uzu gives hugs and forehead touches (which are totally my jam).
Kakashi - Part Five

Chapter Summary

Kakashi is not a happy bunny (wolf?). Shisui and Itachi are in the dog house. Kakashi's grief is (finally!) addressed somewhat. Mama Uzu gives hugs and forehead touches (which are totally my jam).

Chapter Notes

Thank you for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

For anyone wondering about how old Fu is she is over a year old now. It has been nearly a full year since Kushina's death and Naruto's birth. Uzu and family spent several months in Kiri helping out with the whole Yagura being controlled situation and then stuck around to help physically and socially aid the rebuild of Kirigakure. After leaving Kiri they returned to Fire Nation and met up with Kakashi (whilst making their way towards Konoha) before bypassing Konoha and going to Takigakure to rescue Chomei and Fu.

Content warning: Panic attacks, grief, mourning

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kakashi

(Part Five)

*

Takigakure was gone. All gone. Every man and woman killed. Their homes burnt to nothing but piles of ash. All the children too, save for the pair that Uzu had found in the tree. Even the tree was burning now too.

This was all sombre news that needed to be reported back to the Hokage as soon as possible. But first, Kakashi was going to find out how there were four (now five) Jinchūriki and Bijuu roaming around the nations and unaffiliated to any village.

There was no denying it any longer. He had been able to smell something different about them. Something about Rōshi, Han, Utakata and Yugito. They smelt dangerous, wild, fierce, predatory. Like monkey, horse, slug and cat. And now they had a fifth. A baby Jinchūriki (not much older than Naruto and Kakashi wondered how big Naruto would be now compared to Fu) who smelt like beetles and butterflies.

“Did you know?” He asked coldly of his two kouhai. Both Uchiha were standing to attention, giving their taichou their full attention.
“We did.” Shisui answered.

Kakashi stared.

“And you didn’t think it pertinent to mention to your captain that we were travelling with
Jinchūriki?”

“They are not a threat to us Taichou. Not unless you decide to attack them. But I would advise
against it.” Itachi commented.

“The thought hadn’t crossed my mind.” Kakashi said dryly. “But I do not understand how you
could keep such information from me. It makes me question your loyalty.”

That triggered a reaction from both Uchiha. They visibly flinched and bristled.

“We are loyal to Konoha. We have always been loyal to Konoha.” Shisui snarled viciously. Itachi
remained silent but his lips were pressed together tightly.

Kakashi remains silent. He doesn’t know why he’s so angry. So frustrated. Why he’s clenching his
fingers into the palms of his hands so hard that he can feel his nails biting into them.

They – helped me. I had just lost my genin team. I was emotionally compromised but they assisted
me. I have since aided Yugito-chan and we have become… friends. I know what Konoha and the
elders of our village say about the Bijuu. But it is not true.”

Shisui licks his lips and breathes in deeply, letting the air whistle out of his nose loudly.

“The first time I met Uzu-sama, I stabbed Yugito-chan because I thought she was attacking Itachi.
They have never harmed me. Nor do they or the Bijuu intend harm upon Konoha. Whilst Uzu-
sama seems to have an inherent aversion to our village and avoids it whenever she must travel
through Fire, her dislike does not extend to us. I trust her not to bring calamity upon Konoha.”

Kakashi nodded and looked at both Uchiha who were watching him warily.

“Remain here. I’m going to scout.”

Kakashi leapt away, Pakkun at his heels.

* 

The running water of the river was not soothing Kakashi’s ire. Pakkun whined at his heels and
Kakashi sank down onto his haunches and buried his face in his hands. Pakkun nosed at his leg and
leaned against him.

“You’re gonna work yourself up Kakashi.” The pug grumbled. “Deep breaths. You need to bring
your heart rate down. I can hear it thundering away.”

Kakashi pulled his mask down and breathed in slowly. Inhale for two seconds, exhale for four.
Over and over.

“Better.” Pakkun said.

“Thanks. What would I do without you?” Kakashi said dryly and scratched just behind Pakkun’s
ear.
“Be more of an emotional wreck?”

Kakashi shrugged his shoulders. “Probably.”

“You know,” Pakkun began. “I think your teammates are right. These people, they don’t set off any of my warnings. They smell fine, they sound fine, they feel fine.”

“Your canine instincts huh?”

“Sometimes Kakashi, I think your genius brain thinks too much. You are a Hatake. And a fine shinobi. Trust your instincts. Do you think Uzu-sama will bring harm to you?”

Kakashi shook his head.

“Do you think she will harm Konoha?”

“There’s a difference between willingly harming Konoha and harming it as a consequence of her actions.”

“Overthinking again. What are you actually afraid of?” Pakkun rolled his eyes.

Kakashi breathed deeply again. Inhale for two seconds, exhale for four. Inhale for two seconds, exhale for four.

“What if Uzu-sama takes sensei’s son away?” He finally whispered. Pakkun winced at the catch in his voice and the tremulous breaths.

“Would that be a bad thing?” Pakkun said gently. “We aren’t even allowed near the kid. And Genma said that he’s already been to several different foster families because someone leaked that he’s the Kyuubi Jinchūriki. With Uzu-sama, he might not be feared. You know what it’s like to have the village against you. But Kakashi, you can influence their opinion of you. Someday they won’t call you the vile things they do. But Naruto-chan? Come on. Do you honestly think the villagers will stop fearing and hating the Kyuubi inside him?”

Kakashi felt his eye welling up with tears. Obito’s eye was always so quick to weep. Still. After all these years. Kakashi’s own eye hadn’t wept since Minato-sensei and Kushina-san’s demise. Sometimes Kakashi wondered if Obito was weeping for him because he just couldn’t do it.

Pakkun fell silent and leaned harder against his partner.

Together they sat and watched the sunlight sparkle on the river’s surface, saw the fish jump and dragonflies flit amongst the reeds.

* * *

“Kakashi-kun?” Uzu-sama’s voice interrupted Kakashi’s thoughts. Pakkun lifted his head from his paws briefly to sniff at Uzu and his tail thumped on the dirt a couple of times before he returned to his snooze.

“Uzu-sama. Are Shisui and Itachi behaving?” Kakashi made to get up but Uzu gestured for him to remain seated.

She joined him on the grass, her knees furling up beneath her and her robes splayed out behind her. The sunlight caught in her hair and Kakashi felt a pang of remembrance. Kushina-san’s hair had glowed the same colour in bright light.
“They are. Fu-chan seems to have taken a shine to Shisui. And as usual Itachi and Yugito are inseparable.” Uzu-sama said fondly.

“Are they – dating?” Kakashi wondered aloud.

“I do not believe they have realised that yet.” She chuckled. “Itachi is concerned that Yugito-chan is too young yet for a relationship. But he will wait for her I believe. And she will chase him down if he takes too long.”

“Sounds like my sensei and his wife.” Kakashi murmured.

“Not a bad thing to be. But I didn’t come here to discuss my children with you. I came to see if you are well.”

“I am – fine.”

“How long have you been fine?” Uzu-sama said. “For months, years? How often has your response been ‘fine’?”

Kakashi held back a snarl. He felt Pakkun tense against his thigh but the dog didn’t move further. Kakashi was grateful for the reminder of his partner’s presence.

“It is not your concern, Uzu-sama.” He bit out.

“Oh, my lonely, scared Wolf.” Uzu-sama whispered. Her hand reached out to cup Kakashi’s head. He felt forced to look into her eyes. He watched her eyes skim over his face, taking in the forced blank expression. “You are so very sad. I can feel it and see it. Your grief is going to devour if you aren’t careful.”

Kakashi recoiled, scrambling away weakly. Uzu-sama followed. Her hands catching his cheeks and halting his flight.

“Stop.”

He halted and went with her hands. She pulled him into her, bringing his head down to rest against her bosom, her arms pulling his lanky frame into her lap. He was too big to be cradled like a child against her. Too old, too mature, too dirty, too much a killer, too drenched in blood.

A howl ripped its way from his belly, and he convulsed in her arms. His hands beat against her sides. He howled into her chest.

“You can give me your grief Kakashi. My heartbroken Wolf. I can take it. Let go.”

Kakashi felt the barricade he had been shoring up for over a decade crack. His emotions spilled forth like a tidal wave and he wailed. He wailed for his Okaa-san, gone before he could remember her properly. He wailed for his Otou-san who’s own village had vilified and admonished him. He wailed for his clumsy teammate who just wanted to save the village. He wailed for Rin who had thrown herself, selfishly, bravely on his weapon of a hand. He wailed for Minato-sensei and Kushina-san who barely got to meet their child before they died. He wailed for Naruto who would never know the loving touch of his parents, nor know how much Kakashi had wanted to take him and look after him.

Kakashi wailed and raged and pounded his fists into Uzu-sama. He snarled into her breasts and tore at her robes.
The whole time Uzu-sama took his grief, letting him pour it out for the first time. She rocked him in her lap, holding her arms around his back and took all his anger and pain.

* 

When Kakashi was finally spent he was limp against Uzu-sama. His nose ached and his eyes were stinging – both of them. His chest hurt too, from the sobs that had wracked his whole body. He felt tired.

“Uzu-sama?” Pakkun whispered tentatively. “Is Kakashi…”

“I’m good, Pakkun.” Kakashi said. His voice was hoarse.

He lifted his head up from where it had been buried in Uzu-sama’s robes. She unwrapped her arm and pulled out a handkerchief, gently wiping at and patting his cheeks dry. She held it up to his nose and he waited for a moment before blowing into it. Her nose wrinkled slightly and a small curve tilted her lips into a smile.

Kakashi found himself smiling weakly too.

“You are one of mine Kakashi. If you need me I will listen. I will take your anger and grief and pain. Because, my darling one, you can’t keep it all inside. It will fester and grow and hurt you more.”

Kakashi nuzzled his head against Uzu’s, a canine action that he hadn’t done in years. His body instinctively desiring contact. She rubbed her cheek against his and hummed contentedly.

“Thank you, Uzu-sama.”

* 

When Kakashi and his team finally parted ways with Uzu-sama, he pulled Uzu-sama aside.

“I will not tell the Hokage about you, or the Jinchūriki. Or Uzushio.”

Uzu-sama raised an eyebrow.

“There are – forces working within Konoha who would try to take the Jinchūriki from you. And if they found out about you… I am afraid they would not see you as a peaceful advocate for the broken and lost. They would fear you Uzu-sama…”

Uzu shrugged her shoulders wryly.

“I have suspected things are not well within Konoha for a while now. But, Kakashi-kun, if you need to tell the Hokage about us, you should. Do not cause your heart more grief.”

Kakashi leaned in to nuzzle Uzu’s cheek with his own. He inhaled her scent of sea salt, sakura and petrichor.

“For once, I’m listening to my instincts and not my head. Pakkun said I was overthinking things too much.”

“Very well. But if you must, I will not be angry with you. You know that?”

Kakashi nodded and smiled.
“I understand… Uzu-kaa-san.”

Uzu beamed at him and pulled him in to press their foreheads together. Kakashi basked in her affection – so freely and easily given.

“...and your Uchiha teammates are welcome to visit Uzushio. Itachi knows how to reach Yugito-chan. If you need me, head to Uzushio. I will come as quick as I can. Possibly quicker.”

Kakashi laughed.

He hadn’t mentioned Naruto to Uzu, nor had Itachi or Shisui. His sensei’s child was a village secret and even if he disagreed with the Hokage’s decision to keep Naruto’s heritage a secret and to be barred from seeing or interacting with him, he would obey. He had a feeling that Uzu wouldn’t stand for Naruto to be alone for long.

But Kakashi had plans for his return to Konoha. He wasn’t a genius for nothing. There would be some way he could involve himself in Naruto’s life without Anbu noticing… And if the Hokage noticed, Kakashi would take reprimands. Naruto was more important. He was Kakashi’s family and Kakashi didn’t want him to grow thinking not one single person cared for him.

Kakashi was going to do his best to a brother to Naruto. To give him family of sorts. Until Uzu-kaa-san could come at least. And he didn’t doubt she would come.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Karin Part One:
In which we are introduced to Karin and her situation in Grass. Karin is yet another smart child who knows things and can see what people are like. Tsunade doesn't like the way Grass treat children and she threatens physical harm (Mama Uzu is rubbing off on her).
Karin - Part One

Chapter Summary

We are introduced to Karin and her situation in Grass. Karin is another smart child who knows things and can see what people are like. Tsunade doesn't like the way Grass treat children and she threatens physical harm (Mama Uzu is rubbing off on her).

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

Content warning - implied indentured slavery, abuse, threats of violence towards a minor

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Karin

(Part One)

*

She hated them. She *hated* them. She *loathed* them. They kept coming. Coming to their dreary little hut on the hill outside the village. She could hear them climbing and stomping up the steps and their fists beating on the rickety door. Their bellows as they summoned Kaa-san and then their barking orders. Then they always took Kaa-san away. Away for hours and hours.

Kaa-san said that it was the price they had to pay. That Kaa-san had once lived on a beautiful island in a blue sea where there were lots of people like them with red hair and bright glorious lights inside them. That Kaa-san had, had to leave when she was younger because people attacked her home and forced her away. That she had eventually come to Grass where the village took her in because she could help make them better.

Kaa-san said helping people was a good thing.

“Taking away someone’s pain, making them feel better when they hurt. That’s a good thing Karin. Helping others is a gift. Sometimes if you are kind to them, they will remember and pass that kindness on.” Karin’s mother tucked her in bed. “Remember, being kind and helping others isn’t bad.”

Karin still hated them. Every time Kaa-san went with them she came back pale and smelling sharp. All her anger and hatred made Karin’s teeth ache. It made her tummy hurt. And she didn’t like looking at them, even though Kaa-san had got her glasses.

When she looked at the villagers (when Kaa-san took her into the village to get supplies) Karin
could see their inner lights. There were very few who had the glorious warm lights like Kaa-san. Most of them had dark, dim, dull lights.

Kaa-san said she could see chakra. But Karin knew it was more than that. When she looked at the lights of the old lady who ran the sweet shop, who gave Karin a free mochi every time, Karin saw a slow, lazy pulse of light in a soft pink hue. When she looked at the man who Kaa-san said was her supervisor his light was dark, sharp and cold – like the ice that formed on the puddles outside the hut in winter – and it was a deep blue that thrummed quickly and made stabbing motions when he was angry with Kaa-san for taking too long.

Karin hated them. They hurt Kaa-san over and over, biting into her and draining the light out of her. Kaa-san’s light was fading. The blue light, that Karin thought might be the same colour as the ocean of Kaa-san’s island home, was growing fainter. Whenever Kaa-san came back from work the light would be sluggish and slow and it would take longer for it to build back up inside Kaa-san.

But Kaa-san said that Grass was fighting a clan. A clan with pale skin and black hair and hungry teeth. And that meant that Grass shinobi needed healing. So Kaa-san kept going back to the hospital. And staying away longer and longer.

Karin was getting good at making meals. She could cook the rice perfectly now. She hadn’t cut herself when chopping up vegetables for several days. But Kaa-san was too tired to eat. She just slept lots and lots.

* 

Karin wandered through the village warily. Kaa-san had been gone a really long time. She had only just returned home a short while ago and she had fallen straight into the bed they shared and gone to sleep.

Karin had left a portion of food by the fire to stay warm. Just in case. Although she knew Kaa-san wouldn’t eat it. Karin had been waiting for Kaa-san to come home because they were out of vegetables and the rice was getting low. Kaa-san had told her not to go into the village on her own and Karin didn’t really want to. But they needed food.

So Karin had pulled the blankets up over her Kaa-san, stroked back the short hair from her cheeks and kissed her forehead (just like Kaa-san used to do to her) and then collected the money from the tin on the bookshelf and headed into town.

The walk down into the village was uneventful. But Karin grew more and more nervous the further into the wintry streets she walked.

When she was with Kaa-san it was never pleasant but for the most part the villagers ignored them unless they needed to interact. On her own however, Karin was noticing several unpleasant lights getting more unpleasant whenever they noticed her. She wasn’t deaf either. She could hear what they were saying.

She clutched the money in her pocket, fisting it tightly in her clammy palm. The vegetable seller sneered at her when she approached with her woven basket and loaded it up with carrots, potatoes, turnips and courgettes. Karin knew how much they would all cost. Kaa-san always told her how much she had to pay. It was her way of teaching Karin how to manage money.

When the vegetable seller named a price nearly double what they normally paid, Karin felt angry. She could see his inner light was flickering smugly and amused. It was murky as usual but now
tinted with a dark shade of green.

“You’re overcharging me… Sir.” Karin bit out.

“What did you say you little brat?”

“You normally charge my Kaa-san nearly half the price. Are you that greedy?”

The man bristled and snatched her basket from her hands. Karin was dragged along for a second before stumbling and falling onto the muddy slush. She hissed as her hands flew out to brace her fall and skidded on the hard grit and ice shards.

Pushing herself up onto her knees she could see blood welling up in the mess of grey, brown and black dirt.

She bit her lower lip hard, holding back angry words and tears. Kaa-san said that Karin’s temper would get her in trouble. She wiped her hands off gingerly on her already filthy and damp trousers. Something impacted the side of her head hard and she yelped.

“You don’t want to pay? Then you can take your basket and go find food elsewhere. I won’t have some little refugee impugning my good name.”

Karin picked up the now empty basket that he had thrown at her, clenching her fingers around the handle.

“What good name?” She stared at him with cold eyes. “Everyone knows you’re a mean, greedy man. You charge everyone a different price. And keep the best vegetables for yourself. You know what everyone’s saying? They’re saying that your son is a coward. Your son who’s gone onto the battlefield several times and come back unharmed every time. He hides and doesn’t fight but picks up the wounded once the enemy have gone and then scurries back to the village with his tail between his legs.”

He went white with rage. Karin could no longer see the greedy shade of green in his light. Instead there was red. Thick and clogging red sinking into every part of him.

She scrambled away, onto her feet and holding the basket in front of her like a shield.

“You bitch!”

A hand raised into the air. Karin braced for impact.

*  

“A man who calls a little girl a bitch, isn’t much of a man.” A woman’s voice rang out above Karin’s head.

She opened one eye, keeping the other squeezed tightly shut. A female hand, red-tipped fingers, was squeezing the vegetable seller’s wrist. His inner light was now threaded through with pale blue – fear.

“Now, are you going to apologise? Or do I break your arm for the girl as an apology instead?”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! Don’t break my arm!”

“Not the best apology I’ve ever heard, but I’ll let you off.”
“You alright there, girl?”

Karin nodded mutely.

“Did you get what you needed?”

Karin shook her head.

“Well, I’m sure this man will be happy to sell you what you were intending to purchase at the price
you normally pay. He might even throw in a few extra vegetables, as an apology.”

“I’ve already ap-“ The seller stopped mid-sentence and sulkily grunted out an agreement.

Karin handed her basket back to him and he filled it back up with her original vegetables and threw
in some edamame bean pods and a whole sweet potato.

Karin loved sweet potato, but it was normally quite expensive. Kaa-san only bought the ones that
were tiny and almost about to go off. But then they would have sweet potato and rice and curry. There might be enough on this sweet potato to make loads of curry! Two days of sweet potato!

The vegetable seller took Karin’s money – the usual amount he charged and managed to force out
a twisted smile. Karin knew he didn’t mean it. His light was still grey shot through with yellow.

“Thank you.” She said to the seller. She knew he wouldn’t be so polite and kind next time. But for
now, Karin had her vegetables and she had even gained extras for free.

She turned to the woman who had helped her and bowed. “Thank you for helping me.”

“No problem. Where I come from, adults don’t bully little kids.” The woman eyed Karin.

The girl shifted nervously.

“Is that all you needed to get?”

Karin shook her head. “I need to buy rice too.”

“Alright if I tag along? I need to get some rice too. My friend here is going to stock up on
vegetables.”

Karin noticed, for the first time, the motley group who had been standing behind her rescuer. The
one who stepped forward to deal with the vegetable seller had a scar over his eye. When he
grinned, Karin gasped at his pointed teeth.

“Rice? Let’s get going girl.”

Karin nodded and trotted down the street to the stall where Kaa-san usually bought the rice. Karin
wouldn’t be able to buy as much as they usually did. There was no way she could lug a full sack all
the way back up to their hillside hut.

“20 cupful’s please.” Karin said softly and the trader raised an eyebrow.

“You know it’s more expensive by the cup?”
Karin nodded but didn’t say more. The trader shrugged and turned to begin scooping out cupfuls into a smaller sack when Karin’s rescuer spoke up again.

“Actually, we’ll take two full sacks please.”

The woman handed over the money and then picked up the two large sacks as if they were nothing. Karin gaped. This woman was amazing.

“Right, which way kid?”

“Umm which way what?”

The woman chuckled.

“Which way to your home? I’ll carry this rice back for you. Do you mind if my family and I tag along for a bit? I think my leader would like to meet your Kaa-san. I’m Tsunade by the way.”

Karin thought for a moment. On the one hand, this woman was a stranger (although she had saved Karin from being beaten and helped her get extra free vegetables) and Kaa-san had told her to never talk to strangers. On the other, Tsunade seemed friendly enough, her inner light was warm (comforting like Kaa-san’s even) and Karin didn’t think she meant her or Kaa-san harm.

“I’m Karin.”

“Well, Karin? Can we meet your Kaa-san?”

“You’ll have to be quiet. Kaa-san is sleeping. She’s very tired.”

“Quiet. Right. I can try quiet.”

Karin stared at Tsunade. She didn’t think Tsunade could do quiet. But she did want her Kaa-san to meet the first person in this horrible village who didn’t make Karin’s eyes hurt from the lights inside.

Maybe the others would have pretty inner lights too.

And maybe that would make Kaa-san happy. Or the sweet potato might too!

Karin really wanted to make Kaa-san happy.

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Karin Part Two:
Karin brings everyone back to meet her Kaa-san. Her Kaa-san recognises some of the group. Karin is introduced to a relative and they are equally delighted to meet each other.
Karin - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Karin brings everyone back to meet her Kaa-san. Her Kaa-san recognises some of the group. Karin is introduced to a relative and they are equally delighted to meet each other.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Karin

(Part Two)

*

Karin’s Kaa-san was not happy. She was there, at the door, waiting when Karin came back with a motley troop of strangers. Her arms were crossed, and her foot was tapping, and the bags under her eyes seemed darker.

“Karin…” She sighed.

Karin slunk forward and held out the basket of vegetables in both hands. She grinned widely.

“Look Kaa-san! Look! I got sweet potato! For free! Tsunade-san helped me. The nasty vegetable man was going to hit me, but Tsunade-san made him stop and he said sorry and then gave me a large sweet potato! And beans!”

Kaa-san went pale and looked up from her daughter’s beaming face at the woman carrying the two sacks of rice on one shoulder.

“Tsunade-sama? Sannin Tsunade?”

Tsunade shrugged the shoulder with the rice sacks on it. Karin stared in amazement as the shifting weight didn’t phase Tsunade for one second.

“The Sannin have been disbanded for years, but yeah, I’m that Tsunade.”

Kaa-san bowed.

“I hope my daughter wasn’t any trouble Tsunade-sama.”

“Do I have to call you ‘sama’ too?” She asked Tsunade. The woman grinned cheekily.
“Nah, you can keep on using ‘san’, Karin-chan.”

Kaa-san wobbled in the doorway and Karin dropped the basket on the ground to go and cling to her Kaa-san’s knees.

“Do you need to lie down Kaa-san?” Karin asked.

“I’m – I’m fine.” Kaa-san’s voice was breathy and faint. Karin heard a murmur of voices behind her and then Tsunade was there, lifting Kaa-san’s arm over her shoulders and steering her back into their hut.

“You don’t look well. Please, let me take a look at you.”

“I’m afraid, there isn’t much you can do for me Tsunade-sama.” Kaa-san huffed and sank down onto their bed. “No healer can help me.”

Tsunade snorted. “I’d be offended but I’ve only recently come back into the healing gig. May I at least take a look at you?”

Karin hovered by the bed, wringing her hands and darting her eyes between her Kaa-san and Tsunade. She didn’t notice the group traipsing into the hut and fiddling around in the kitchen and with the rice sacks and her basket of vegetables.

Kaa-san wheezed and coughed before nodding to Tsunade. Karin’s hands hurt as she squeezed them together.

“What’re you doing to my Kaa-san?” She demanded.

“I’m using my chakra to look at her body. Her outside and her insides.” Tsunade said as her hands lit up with green light.

Karin furrowed her brow and stared at Tsunade’s inner light. It was still big and pure and warm but now there were hints of orange and purple. Karin squinted. She didn’t remember seeing two colours before. Normally it was just the grey or pure base light with a single shade to show emotions. But Tsunade’s light was pure and orange and purple.

“May I?” Tsunade gestured at Kaa-san’s sleeve and then rolled it up after Kaa-san nodded.

Tsunade hissed in through her teeth and Karin wrinkled her nose. She didn’t know why Tsunade was making that noise. Kaa-san had always had the bite marks. Always. For as long as Karin could remember. There were newer ones now though, ones that were oozing with blood and pus.

Kaa-san always kept them covered up when they went out but sometimes, when the wounds were particularly sore, she would leave them exposed in their hut. She said the wounds needed to breath.

“I’m so sorry.” Tsunade grit out and then began using her green glowing hands on Kaa-san’s arms. Karin watched in awe as the bite marks began to heal. Tsunade wiped away the blood and pus tenderly as the wounds closed up with a handkerchief.

“Can you tell me why you are covered in bite marks?” Tsunade turned her attention to Kaa-san’s other arm. “There is no reason for your body to be so scarred if there isn’t some deeper meaning and purpose to them.”

Kaa-san’s eyes were wide and her wheezing breaths were long and painful.
“You’re frightening her!” Karin protested.

“I know. I’m sorry. But if your Kaa-san doesn’t tell me why people have been biting her, I can’t help. I need to understand why.”

“They bite her because –” Karin began.

“Karin!” Kaa-san snapped out. Karin’s lower lip began to tremble and her eyes welled up.

“I promise, we can help.” Tsunade begged but Kaa-san shook her head and coughed.

“I can illuminate Tsunade-chan.” Another woman, one who had come in with the rest of the group, who were all busy pretending they weren’t listening and preparing food with great attention to detail, sidled up to kneel beside the bed.

Kaa-san’s eyes widened. She looked at the new woman with awe. Karin tilted her head too and squeezed her eyes shut. This other woman, this woman with hair far redder than Karin’s and Kaa-san’s, her inner light was gold. Gold and vast and strong. It thrummed. Stronger than Tsunade’s and anyone else Karin had ever met.

There was so much of the inner light, it made Karin’s eyes ache looking at it. She whimpered and clambered onto the bed, burying her face in Kaa-san’s stomach.

* 

Karin lifted her head when Kaa-san began to try and sit up.

“Uzushio?” She whispered hoarsely.

Karin scowled at the brightly lit woman. Kaa-san shouldn’t be trying to sit up. Not when she was so tired.

“Please, don’t get up.” Uzu laid a hand on Kaa-san’s shoulder and guided her to lay back. Karin nuzzled into Kaa-san and watched warily.

“How – how are you here Uzushio-sama?”

“I go by Uzu now. I am glad you survived Kimiyo Uzumaki.” Uzu said. One of the men who had entered their hut perked up excitedly and trotted over to kneel next to Uzu.

“Uzu-kaa-chan? Are they really Uzumaki’s?”

“I go by Uzu now. I am glad you survived Kimiyo Uzumaki.” Uzu said. One of the men who had entered their hut perked up excitedly and trotted over to kneel next to Uzu.

“Uzu-kaa-chan? Are they really Uzumaki’s?”

Kaa-san chuckled and looked at the man. Karin looked at him too. He had a similar pure light to Uzu and Tsunade. In fact, Karin spared a moment to look at all the strangers in her home. They all had a pure light. Some had more than one light though. As if there were two people inside of them. There was so much light that Karin’s eyes began to weep and sting.

“Nagato-kun, meet your cousin, twice removed I believe, Kimiyo Uzumaki. And I believe this is Kimiyo-chan’s daughter.”

Tsunade chuckled. “I thought Karin-chan’s red hair probably meant she was an Uzumaki. Only a shade lighter than yours Uzu-sama and Nagato-kun’s is a perfect match.”

Nagato grinned at both women and then leaned in to smile at Karin.

“Hi Karin-chan. It’s really nice to meet you, you and your Okaa-san. I’ve been waiting to meet
another Uzumaki for years.”

Karin smiled shyly and looked at her cousin.

“Nice to meet you too.” She murmured bashfully.

“Konan, Yahiko! Come meet my cousins! In fact, Karin,” Nagato held out his hand. “Would you like to come and meet my family? We’re all adopted so I have a lot of siblings. They can be yours too.”

Karin’s breath caught in her chest and she glanced at Kaa-san. Kaa-san stroked her hair back from her face and tapped her on the nose lightly. Karin’s eyes crossed as she tried to see the end of her nose and Nagato laughed brightly.

“Go on. Go meet your cousin’s family. I need to speak with Uzu-sama and Tsunade-sama.”

Nagato stood and held out both his hands, sliding them onto Karin’s sides and lifting her easily over Kaa-san’s body. He didn’t put her down on the ground once she was clear of the bed however, but settled her onto his hip, supporting her with one arm.

She grabbed at her hair and stuffed some of it into her mouth and began to suck. Behind her she heard Kaa-san begin to protest but Nagato moved away too quickly so Karin carried on sucking at her hair as she was introduced to all the glowing people.

*  

Karin had never met so many nice, friendly people before. She found it disconcerting how friendly all of Nagato-nii’s siblings were. Although she didn’t think Konan-nee and Yahiko-nii were his siblings. Not when they kept kissing him on the cheeks and lips.

Kisame-nii (the one with the scar over his eye and the pointy teeth) had made curry. Lots and lots of curry. With lots of sweet potatoes! Karin knew there was drool in the corner of her mouth and she licked her lips ravenously.

“Everyone, get your bowls out!” Kisame shouted cheerily and there was a cacophony as they all rummaged through their bags and produced scrolls or bowls and cutlery. Karin wriggled in Nagato’s hold until he noticed and carried her over to the shelf where her and Kaa-san’s bowls were. She carefully picked them both up and clutched them excitedly.

Nagato-nii and Kisame-nii gave her and Kaa-san the first serving. And there was so much of it! Both bowls were piled high with white fluffy rice and chunks of sweet potato and other vegetables covered in a green-brown sauce. It smelt amazing.

Konan-nee carried Kaa-san’s over to the bed, along with another bowl for Tsunade-san and Uzu-sama. Karin watched as Kaa-san was gently sat up in bed, with Tsunade-san’s assistance, and under the healer’s watchful eye began to eat small spoonfuls of the meal.

As soon as she saw her Kaa-san eating Karin dived into her own bowl. A loud hum of pleasure filled the air and Kisame-nii grinned proudly.

“Kisame-nii cooking is the best, right Karin-chan?” Yugito-nii dropped onto the ground next to Nagato and Karin (who was sat in her cousin’s lap) and winked. “But never eat anything Uzu-nee gives you… Unless Kisame-nii tells you it’s alright. One-time Uzu-nee gave us all food poisoning – well, me, Kisame-nii, Utakata-nii, Yahiko-nii, Nagato-nii and Konan-nee. That was before we found Kabuto-kun and long before we met Tsunade-oba-chan and Shizune-nee.”
Karin wrinkled her nose and glanced over at the woman who was still glowing brightly to Karin’s eyes. Since spending time with the rest of the group, her eyes had settled down somewhat and she was no longer squinting when she looked at them. Their lights were no longer blinding and overwhelming. Although, occasionally, out of the corner of her eye some of them would flicker and flare. She had noticed that it was only five of them. Fū-chan, Yugito-nee, Utakata-nii, Rōshi-san and Han-san. They were the only ones with two lights inside them.

Karin wondered how and why Yugito-nee had another person inside her, but decided to eat as much curry as possible before it went cold.

* 

After they had all eaten and the group began to separate to do various jobs such as washing up the many bowls and spoons and setting up tents outside to sleep in, Karin and Nagato-nii returned to Kaa-san and the two older women.

“Kimiyo-oba-san, you have an amazing little girl.” Nagato praised and Karin felt her heart flutter. Nobody had ever said nice things about her before. Only Kaa-san. And Kaa-san had to say nice things because she was her Kaa-san (not that, that didn’t make them true, but it is a Kaa-san’s job to say nice things about their child).

Kaa-san smiled and winked at Karin. “Thank you, Nagato-kun. Karin-chan’s always been very independent. You wouldn’t believe she’s only three and half, would you?”

Karin preened and then was suddenly overcome with awareness and fisted her hands in Nagato’s shirt, crumpling it.

Tsunade-san shook her head with a bewildered expression.

“Are all Uzushio offspring gifted? First Kabuto-kun, now Karin-chan? How many more Uzushio children are we going to meet who far exceed child growth milestones?”

Uzu-sama laughed and the bells in her hair pealed nosily.

Uzu-sama’s laugh made her light glow even brighter. But this time, instead of blinding Karin it seemed to reach out and fill the hut, touching every single person inside. Karin felt it pass over and through her and she gasped.

It was so warm. Warm and full of love.

* 

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Kimiyo - Righteous

Next Chapter - Karin Part Three:
Karin and her Kaa-chan make a decision. Uzu and the family ready themselves to leave. Karin sticks close to Tsunade or Nagato. Uzu stands between them and their enemy.
Chapter Summary

Karin and her Kaa-chan make a decision. Uzu and the family ready themselves to leave. Karin sticks close to Tsunade or Nagato. Uzu stands between them and their enemy.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Karin

(Part Three)

* 

That night, Karin slept curled up next to Kaa-san as usual and listened to the rattling breaths that wheezed and whistled their way in and out of Kaa-san. She knew Kaa-san wasn’t supposed to sound like that. She also knew that Kaa-san’s light was fading. It was growing dimmer and dimmer, day by day.

Karin didn’t want to think about what would happen if the light went out.

Kaa-san had cuddled her close and whispered a new story to her before bedtime. A story Karin had never heard before. One of Kaa-san’s home. Of a house with a red-tiled roof, on an island in the middle of the bluest sea she could imagine, with herbs and spices growing in the garden and Kaa-san’s parents; her dad with Uzumaki red hair and her mother with silver hair from the Hou-ou clan, teaching her how to heal.

Karin longed to see Kaa-san’s home. It sounded wonderful. So much nicer and brighter and warmer than Grass.

“Can we go there Kaa-san?” Karin whispered.

“Would you like to? Because, a long time ago, before you were even a thought in my mind, I had to leave my home because it was attacked. Uzu-sama has made it safe again, and we could go there.”

Karin nodded furiously but then stopped. “If we go there, would you have to let people bite you still?”

Kaa-san rubbed her nose against Karin’s. “No, my darling. Tsunade-sama is a great healer. She can heal without people biting her. The only time I would offer is if Tsunade-sama couldn’t heal someone and that probably won’t happen.”
Karin thought for a while. Kaa-san waited patiently, her brown eyes tracing over Karin’s deep in thought face.

“I would like to go, Kaa-san. I would like to go to the place where you won’t have to hurt anymore. And I’d like to be with Nagato-nii and the others too. Because Nagato-nii said we were family. So we don’t have to be alone anymore if we go with them, right?”

“Right. Uzu-sama has said we are family.”

Karin snuggled into Kaa-san’s arms.

“Can we go tomorrow?”

Kaa-san chuckled. “That is the plan. We just need to gather up our clothes, your toys and books and then we can go.”

Karin wriggled excitedly. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to sleep Kaa-san. I’m too excited.”

Kaa-san began trailing her fingers down Karin’s back. Slowly, smoothly, lightly pressing down then lifting and starting from the top of her spine and back down. Over and over.

Karin found herself yawning and shook her head weakly. There was the sound of a shamisen being played quietly and the peaceful melody combined with her Kaa-san’s comforting strokes lulled Karin off to sleep.

When she dreamt, it was of the house with the red-tiled roof, the herbs in the garden and the bluest sea she could imagine.

*

They were woken by the sound of Fū-chan crying from across the room. Kaa-san had offered to let the woman stay in their hut (as there were fewer of them and they could all just about squeeze in). Karin’s watched blearily as Uzu-sama clambered to her feet and cradling Fū-chan in her arms hummed.

Kaa-san was still sleeping deeply but Karin wanted to know why Fū-chan was crying. She carefully climbed over her sleeping mother and wound her way between the sleeping forms of all the women (except for Konan-nee because she was sleeping with Yahiko-nii and Nagato-nii).

“Why’s she crying?” Karin mumbled and rubbed at her eyes with the back of her hands, yawning widely.

“She’s hungry.” Uzu-sama said. “And she has nightmares too. Not long ago Fū-chan and Shibuki-kun lost their home and their family.”

“Like my Kaa-san did?”

“Like your Kaa-san.”

“Fū-chan’s only a baby. Can she really remember that?” Karin blinked as Uzu-sama led her over to sit down on the cushions near the fire pit and then placed the snivelling baby in her lap.

Fū-chan settled down slightly and stared up at Karin. Karin glanced nervously at Uzu-sama but the woman was already back in the kitchen area, preparing a bottle of milk and some fruit for Fū-chan. Karin held out a finger to Fū and sucked in a breath as the baby grabbed hold tightly.
“She’s so strong.”

“Babies are. And yes, although Fū-chan is still young and won’t remember details of losing her home she can still remember little bits of it.”

“That’s sad. Will she always have bad dreams?”

“Probably not. Dreams are a way of processing information and coming to terms with it. When she’s safe and warm and feels loved, Fū-chan will hopefully stop having nightmares.”

Karin smiled and wriggled her finger in the baby girl’s grasp. Fū babbled and grinned back too.

“Cho-Cho. Shi-Shi. Ka-Ka!”

“I’m coming Fū-chan.” Uzu-sama said and true to her word settled down at Karin’s side with a plate of soft fruits all cut up and a bottle of warm milk. Karin watched as Uzu-sama lifted Fū-chan off Karin’s lap and settled her against her chest. Fū-chan latched onto the teat and sucked noisily and hungrily.

Karin giggled at the noise the small baby made.

“She’s super hungry.”

“She’s growing. Growing children are always hungry.” Uzu-sama teased and winked at Karin.

Karin watched as Fū-chan fed. Slowly the sun rose and illuminated the hut through the cracked and lopsided shutters that couldn’t fully block out the light. Uzu-sama’s family began to wake too and shuffled around preparing breakfast, washing and readying themselves for the day.

Karin ended up with the baby in her lap again whilst the adults and older children helped sort things out. She was joined by Kabuto-kun and Shibuki-kun. Karin chatted softly with them but couldn’t help noticing Shibuki-kun’s alert gaze on Fū-chan. He looked scared that she might disappear at any second.

She passed Fū-chan over to Shibuki and saw the boy settle almost instantaneously. Kabuto pushed his glasses up on his nose and his brow furrowed slightly when he saw Shibuki relax, but he didn’t say anything.

Breakfast was a filling, but quick affair. Karin was shortly dressed with a knapsack on her back containing her few meagre possessions. Kaa-san had been wrapped up in her own clothing too and carefully transferred to a litter that had been made before the light faded the previous evening.

Karin giggled when Kaa-san was piled with blankets so that only her head and face poked out. Tsunade-san even produced a hat and tugged it down over Kaa-san’s hair and ears.

“Ready for the winter chill.” She announced and winked cheekily at Karin. Karin skipped over and slipped her hand into Tsunade’s. The woman blinked twice before her fingers tightened gently around Karin’s own, much smaller grasp.

“Move out!” Uzu-sama called from the front of their caravan. Fū-chan was strapped onto her chest using a cloth sling and the baby was burbling and babbling away merrily to Shibuki-kun and Kisame-nii.

“Going to walk with us Karin-chan?” Tsunade asked.
Karin looked around the adults who were going to taking it in shifts to carry Kaa-san and nodded.

“Well, if you want to join the kids at any point you can.”

Karin shook her head and squeezed Tsunade’s finger tightly. She was happy here, for now, with Tsunade-san and Kaa-san.

* 

Leaving the boundaries of the village was easy. Nobody ventured up the hill to where Karin lived, not unless they were coming to collect Kaa-san after a battle. Karin trotted along contentedly with Tsunade-san and listened to Rōshi-san failing flirtations. Kaa-san was chuckling and sharing comments with Han-san who was carrying the other end of the litter.

Karin found herself ignoring the adults’ boring (silly) conversations and taking in the land around her. She had been born in the village and had never left its boundaries in her short life. Grass really was aptly named. Vast plains of long grass stretched out before them.

Yugito-nee bounced past and screeched something about rolling in it and was answered with shaking heads, laughter and teasing calls. Karin wrinkled her nose as Yugito-nee began to roll in the long grass, flattening it and writhing around.

“Why’s Yugito-nee doing that?” She innocently asked Tsunade-san. She waited patiently for an answer, staring expectantly up at her.

“Umm… Yugito-chan’s a cat summoner. She’s picked up some of her summons proclivities… of sorts…”

Rōshi-san sniggered. Karin glanced between him and Tsunade-san but couldn’t understand what was funny. It made sense. Yugito-nee could summon cats and cats liked to roll around in grass so Yugito-nee liked to do the same.

* 

They walked fast and steady, making good progress through Grass, reaching the border to Fire by the evening.

It was at the border that they faced some resistance from Kusa shinobi.

“Travellers. We have received word that you have taken two civilians from Kusagakure.” A shinobi announced from his position in the middle of the path.

Karin tucked herself in behind Nagato-nii’s legs, grasping the fabric of his cloak fiercely. Her body was trembling. She didn’t think that the shinobi would try and stop them leaving.

“I wouldn’t say taken,” Uzu-sama drawled imperiously. “Rather, I have extended an invitation to Kimiyo-san and she has accepted.”

“We cannot allow you to take them.”

“Oh snap.” Kimimaro-nii said with a wicked grin. “He’s on his second chance already. Uzu-kaa-chan is going to obliterate them.”

Karin glanced up at him and he winked down at her where she was trying to hide herself in Nagato’s cloak. Kimimaro-nii looked totally relaxed and she could see the others were unphased.
Kisame-nii was yawning, Yugito-nee was playing with Kōgō the cat’s paws and talking to Utakata-nii, Konan-nee and Yahiko-nii were whispering in each other’s ears and glancing over at Nagatoni-nii, Kabuto-kun and Shibuki-kun were looking at a plant with Shizune-nee, Jūgo-kun was talking to some small birds that had landed on his upturned palms, Rōshi-san and Han-san were bantering pleasantly with Tsunade-san.

The only person who looked concerned was Kaa-san, but she was laying low on the litter.

There was an indignant shriek from the front of their group as Fū-chan was lifted from her sling and passed to Utakata-kun. The baby was not pleased to be handed away just as the excitement was brewing.

“I think, shinobi-san, you will find that I am not ‘taking’ Kimiyo-chan or Karin-chan because they are not belongings to be taken in the first place. You will understand that they are travelling with me because Kimiyo and Karin Uzumaki are returning to their homeland.”

The shinobi flinched. “Uzushiogakure fell. Long ago. That is why they are here. They sought refuge in Grass and were granted it.”

“For a steep price.” Uzu-sama snapped. Karin flinched as the golden light that Uzu-sama contained swelled and billowed from her. “Using Kimiyo-chan for her abilities without any consideration for her wellbeing. It is unconscionable and inhumane. I have the right to liberate any of my citizens from villages that are treating them as less than human. Do you really wish to cause a diplomatic incident? Are you really willing to go against the Uzukage?”

The shinobi took two steps back. Kisame-nii grinned wickedly.

“And who in your party is the Uzukage?”

“I am.”

The shinobi stared at Uzu-sama with a new fear.

“Now, I am returning, with my people to their homeland. If you really want to test me, and I wouldn’t advise it considering your current ongoing conflict with the Kaguya clan, then you can come after us. Move, or I will make you move.”

The shinobi moved. He signalled to his squad in the grass and they all scattered.

Karin let Nagato-nii pick her up and clung tightly to him. It wasn’t until they were safely beyond the borders of Grass that they relaxed.

“Do we have to go back?” She whispered.

He leaned in and nuzzled his nose against hers.

“No, Karin-chan. You and Kimiyo-san are coming home. You won’t have to go back.”

Karin grinned and nuzzled her nose against Nagato’s.

“I’m so happy.”

“Me too.”

*
Next Chapter - Kabuto Part Three:
Kabuto has turned into a philosopher. He worries about the state of the world, his family and Mama Uzu. He has a plan. Tsunade and Uzu inspect a tree. Kabuto thinks they've finally cracked.
Kabuto - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Kabuto has turned into a philosopher. He worries about the state of the world, his family and Mama Uzu. He has a plan. Tsunade and Uzu inspect a tree. Kabuto thinks they've finally cracked.

Chapter Notes

ITAV reached 600+ kudos today so y'all know what that means?! DOUBLE UPDATE!

Thank you for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kabuto

(Part Three)

*

Kabuto had learnt many things in the seven years that Uzu-kaa-chan had been his mother. He had learnt about things such as love.

He had learnt that Tsunade-oba-chan could be as motherly as Uzu-kaa-chan and that she gave great hugs. He had learnt that Yugito-nee and Utakata-nii could sometimes be incredibly sad, but they would always cheer up when he snuggled up with them. He had learnt that Kisame-nii poured love into every bite of his food that he made for everyone.

He had learnt that Yahiko, Konan and Nagato’s love for each other was not something unusual like it would have been in his hometown, that it was beautiful. He had learnt that Jugo’s puppy love was quickly turning into real love and Kimimaro’s fond affection was evolving just as swiftly, but Kimimaro wouldn’t do anything – not until Jugo-nii was old enough.

He had learnt that Rōshi-ji-chan, whilst an incorrigible flirt, and seemingly perpetually grumpy was actually a softie who enjoyed playing with the kids in many of the towns and villages they stopped in. He had learnt that Han-ji-chan would always offer a piggyback or sit up and read a book to him when he couldn’t sleep.

He had learnt that Uzu-kaa-chan had so much love that she gave to all her people on Uzushio. That she had more to spare for the Konoha brats that she had adopted into their crazy, odd, marvellous family. He had come to understand that the woman he had called mother, all those years ago, had – in her own way – loved him. It caused him sorrow to think he had been so cold and distant to her, even though she had tried to show him love. But he hadn’t been able to understand it. Not then. Not how he did now.
Kabuto had also learnt that the world beyond Uzushio – the world he had been protected from for several years now – was not as kind and loving as Uzushio and Uzu-kaa-chan. He had seen many things since the war ended and he had returned to travelling with Uzu-kaa-chan and his reunited family.

Villages rebuilding themselves. War torn fields and meadows and forests and plains littered with the remnants of battle. Poppies growing where the blood had fallen and the soil had been churned up viciously.

Kabuto wasn’t sure he enjoyed the world beyond Uzushio. He longed for the island where he and his family were safe. Where they didn’t face cruelty and tragedy. He had been thinking, long and hard, since leaving the ruined village of Takigakure (a sight that had been so disturbing that Uzu-kaa-chan had forbidden them from going to see). When they eventually returned to Uzushio, Kabuto was going to stay on Uzushio.

He didn’t want to see people suffering any longer. Not until he could develop his healing skills. So he could be like his birth mother. So he could help. So he could save people like Tsunade-ba-chan. Like Uzu-kaa-chan. Like his adored siblings. So he could be of more use.

He was resolved in his decision. A few years on Uzushio would allow him to practice and develop his healing techniques. And it would give him time to access the Hou-ou vault. There were medical scrolls and documents and tools within the vault that he had been too young, too naïve to use. But now, he had seen the hurt humans could inflict on them. And he knew, that like Tsunade-ba-chan and Shizune-nee, he could help. Ease their suffering, mend their cuts and bones. Heal their physical forms.

And maybe, maybe when he was older and knew more, he could help heal people’s minds. It seemed to Kabuto (and Shizune-nee when he spoke to her about it) that the world, not just the shinobi world, but everyone needed help sometimes. He had seen shinobi on Uzushio return from missions that went sideways and they would wander around the island overly paranoid and worried and tired.

He had seen the children Uzu-kaa-chan had rescued during the Third War. War orphans, traumatised by the sights and sounds and smells they had endured. Children who woke screaming every night. Who flinched at loud noises. Who wept when they were given food. Who took said food and hid it in places around the island, little caches of food, terrified (like he had once been) that the food would run out and they would starve.

Shizune-nee and Tsunade-ba-chan did their best but they didn’t specialise in the mind. He had heard about the Yamanaka clan in Konoha. They seemed to be the closest the shinobi world had to mind healers. But that was one clan who relied primarily on a clan technique to help heal the mind. Kabuto was certain, that if he understood more how the mind worked, how people’s emotions influenced them and their actions and reactions, he could help.

Kabuto had felt this certainty filling him. Swelling inside him and making his heart thunder in his ears. This, this was what he wanted to do. What he wanted to achieve. How he wanted to specialise and help people. Tsunade-ba-chan was a battle medic and surgical genius amongst her more standardised abilities. Shizune-nee was a battle medic and a poisons and antidotes specialist. Kabuto would be a medic – capable of assisting and carrying out surgeries and general healing – and a mind healer.

*Uzu-kaa-chan was not so sad now. Kabuto knew that her grief at loosing Kushina-san and the
consequent resealing of Kyuubi-sama still haunted her. In the year since Kushina-san’s death, Uzu-kaa-chan’s grief had faded. It was still there, sometimes she would grow sorrowful and mournful.

Her overwhelming grief had simmered down now to a longing and a weariness. But Kabuto knew that his Kaa-chan still had her hope and love and compassion for humans. Even if they were selfish and greedy and fearful sometimes.

Kabuto was concerned. They were nearing Konoha. Konoha – the village where Kushina-san had died. The village who’s founding fathers had cruelly used and abused Kyuubi-sama and later the Bijuu. The village who had taken the Bijuu and then Mito-sama and Kushina-san and more and more of Uzushio’s children. The village that hadn’t come to Uzushiogakure’s aid.

In all the years Kabuto had been with Uzu-kaa-chan, they had avoided Konoha. Left Kushina-san and the other survivors who had taken refuge in the village hidden in the leaves, to be safe and part of the village that had given them sanctuary and where most of them had spent their formative years. Now they were going there.

Because Uzu-kaa-chan had made a promise. A promise to one of her beloved children. A promise that she had not been able to keep yet. Their time with Yagura-nii had taken nearly a year, finding and helping Kakashi-nii took up more time. Rescuing Fu-chan and Shibuki-kun had taken less than a week. But travelling with such a young baby and a traumatised child was not a swift process. And then liberating Kimiyo-san and Karin-chan… Kimiyo-san was too weak to move quickly. They had only journeyed slowly, taking many rests and making little progress. Kimiyo-san’s illness wasn’t improving.

They had ended up renting a house in a small village towards the border of Tea for over a month when the autumn weather made it too dangerous for Kimiyo-san to continue travelling. The owner of the house was a rich merchant who spent the autumn and winter months in warmer climates, so they had lived in fairly luxurious settings.

The Ame Trio kept disappearing for days and weeks. Vanishing in the night and returning to whisper with the other adults, leaving the young ones to amuse themselves. They would stay for maybe half a day before vanishing once again.

One time they returned bringing news that the Kaguya clan had been wiped out, but at great expense to Kusagakure. The shinobi had suffered heavy losses and they were far too weak to go against Uzu to try and retrieve Kimiyo. Never mind that Uzu had obliterated their trail using a seal and they wouldn’t be able to access Uzushio if they did manage to cross Fire.

Kimimaro didn’t seem upset at all that his clan had all perished. Kabuto supposed that he wouldn’t feel much sorrow for the people who had kept him in a cage like an animal for most of his life.

Rumours were beginning to spread however, of the Rise of Uzushiogakure. Rumours that weren’t believed - yet, but treated like wishful fairy tales or ghost stories. How long, Kabuto wondered, before someone investigated the rumours and pieced together the tales of Kishi Bojin and her children, and the island hidden in the whirlpools and the mist?

* 

“Uzu-kaa-chan…” He said softly. She had stopped, halted dead in the middle of the trail and was glowering towards a tree.

“Take Fu-chan a moment Kabuto-kun.” She passed the green-haired infant to him. They were all practiced hands at holding the growing toddler, who had a habit of wandering off if left unattended.
“Is something wrong? Utakata-nii? Can you sense anything?” Kabuto looked up at the teen who had been reading as he walked along with them.

Saiken was riding on his shoulder, his eyestalks were fixed on the direction that Uzu-kaa-chan was prowling predatorily towards.

“I can’t sense anything unusual. As far as I can tell we are alone in the woods.” Utakata said. “But Kaa-chan’s a bit different isn’t she. She has probably sensed something.”

The whole family had caught up by this point and were watching bemusedly as Uzu halted at a sturdy tree. There was nothing unique or different about this particular tree. It was the same as several of the other deciduous species in the forests of Fire Nation. It had bare branches – clear of leaves as winter came and was decorated with the first furls and fern-like patterns of frost.

It was, to all of them, a perfectly normal tree.

“Umm… Has Uzu-kaa-chan lost it?” Kimimaro snarked to Utakata and wrapped his arm around the teen’s shoulders, dislodging Saiken momentarily before catching the slug Bijuu and depositing him on Utakata’s head.

“That is not a normal tree…” Kokuō said and struck at the ground with a dainty hoof. She had materialised several times in the last few weeks and allowed Kimiyo-san to ride on her back. They all knew that Kokuō found her sweet-nature and polite disposition pleasant, and they both enjoyed discussing herbs and plant uses.

“You are correct sister.” Son grumbled and swung on a branch adjacent to the tree. He grabbed a thin branch, snapping it from his perch and lobbed it at the tree.

The tree didn’t move or flinch or react in anyway.

“Well that was disappointing.” Yugito announced. Matatabi chuckled and grinned.

“We could… cut it down?” Saiken suggested.

“An excellent suggestion. We need firewood for this evening. Now, whom shall we inflict upon the tree?” Matatabi said slyly.

“I’ll do it!” Tsunade offered. “Rōshi, lend me your axe.”

“Just my axe? You don’t want anything more from me?” Rōshi leered.

He handed over his axe and dodged the fist Tsunade sent half-heartedly his way.

Kabuto and everyone else groaned at the Jinchūriki’s (frankly) pathetic attempt at flirtation. Shizune-nee whispered into Kisame’s ear and the man chuckled and winked at her. Kabuto wrinkled his nose. Everyone knew that Kisame-nii and Shizune-nee were a couple… But he really didn’t want to think about what they got up to in their tent.

“Right, stand back Uzu-sama. One tree, coming down!” Tsunade said gleefully and lifted the axe back over her shoulder, preparing to swing.

“Couldn’t she just pull it up? We’ve seen her pull up trees before to throw at Rōshi-ji-chan and Kisame-nii.” Jugo commented.

“Yeah, but chopping is more therapeutic.” Konan answered. “Sometimes, just chopping stuff down...
Yet again, Kabuto thought, another example of poor-coping mechanisms and untreated mental and emotional issues.

Tsunade never got to chop the tree down, because it hastily shrank and transformed. The family watched with a mixture of intrigue, amusement, bemusement and shock. Tsunade dropped the axe and her jaw dropped.

“Right. I know I’ve been out of Konoha for a while, but I know, for a fact, that I am the last Senju. So, who the hell are you kid?”

The boy, with wide eyes and a nervous twitch to his fingers glanced between Uzu-kaa-chan and Tsunade-ba-chan.

“I’m Kinoe. And Orochimaru made me.”

* 

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kinoe Part 1 will be posted shortly!
Kinoe - Part One

Chapter Summary

Kinoe is exhibiting stalker tendencies (not that the little cupcake knows that it's bad to follow someone secretly). He's also beginning to question whether what his job entails is right. He has a minor panic about the Bijuu. Its a tiny one really.

Chapter Notes

DOUBLE UPDATE!
Make sure you've read Kabuto - Part Three before this chapter.

And for those of you who might be confused as to who the hell Kinoe is, Kinoe is Tenzo/Yamato before he became Tenzo and later Yamato. Just in case you've forgotten.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kinoe

(Part One)

*

Kinoe was – conflicted. He had been conflicted for a while now. Danzō-sama suspected he was conflicted. Suspected he had doubts about Root. Suspected that he did not like Danzō-sama having an alliance with Orochimaru. Orochimaru who had made Kinoe what he was.

Kinoe had been glad that Kakashi had prevented him from killing the Third Hokage. But Danzō-sama had punished him cruelly for his ‘failure’. Kinoe knew that without the First Hokage’s cells and his Mokuton he would still be bearing the marks of his failure to this day.

Kakashi had been different. He wasn’t like the Root operatives whom Kinoe was occasionally paired up with. He had been – gentle. Kinoe thought that he rather liked Kakashi’s gentleness. He had taken to watching Kakashi, keeping an eye on him whenever he could sneak away from Root headquarters and away from Danzou-sama’s ever watching eyes.

Kinoe had always thought himself to be selfish, selfish until Danzō-sama had it trained out of him. He had selfishly longed for freedom whilst floating in the tank. Selfish in wanting to see the smiles and laughter of the girl who had been the last of their tankmates alive. Selfish in not wanting her tank to finally crack and give up and for her to live. Selfish in his desire not to be alone in the dark and the cold. Selfish in wanting to be more than a test in a glass world. Selfish in wanting, needing, begging to live when his own tank inevitably failed and began to end his life.

Selfish in taking Danzō-sama’s hand and adoring the warmth of another human.
Kinoe had the selfishness beaten out of him until he was the perfect shinobi. The perfect tool. His only existence and reason for being to protect the village at Danzō-sama’s orders.

But Kinoe was being selfish again now. Selfish in his desire to try and understand and know Kakashi. He didn’t know what it was about the older teen, but there was something about him that Kinoe wanted to know, wanted to comprehend, wanted to see and feel and be a part of, even if it was only from the shadows.

Now, he was shadowing Kakashi once more, this time out of the village and Kinoe had felt his heart pang selfishly when Kakashi met up with a strange group. He had felt his heart ache when Kakashi was embraced and he smiled. Kinoe hadn’t seen Kakashi smile before. It was heart-wrenching that these outsiders, these other shinobi, these people who were not part of the village Kinoe and Kakashi were charged with protecting could make him smile so easily.

Kinoe had seen Kakashi getting closer to some of his age mates recently. Genma was the first, then Gai whom Kinoe found exhausting and he had never interacted with the jumpsuit wearing shinobi. After that it had been another of Orochimaru’s failed experiments – Anko, the one who was damaged and marked by Orochimaru but was able to walk in the sun and throw herself at Kurenai and be met with an equally fond and welcoming embrace. Then Asuma, whom Kinoe had studied before when preparing to assassinate the Hokage.

Kakashi had never shown such a smile to his friends however, not when Kinoe had ever been present to see. Here he was, accepting embraces and shoulder pats and a kiss on the cheek over his mask from the red-haired leader and smiling.

Kinoe wanted Kakashi to smile at him like that. Kinoe wanted Kakashi to notice him, but he couldn’t let the teen see or know he was being followed. If Danzō-sama discovered Kinoe’s Kakashi-watching habits… Kinoe could feel Danzō-sama’s rules and restrictions tugging at his mind, calling for him to return to headquarters.

Kinoe watched as Kakashi mingled and spoke and cuddled with the various members of the group. The Hound Anbu mask attached to his waist and him freely bearing his cloth-masked face to all. Kinoe observed the leader encouraging and jostling Kakashi to lay down with his head on her lap and bit his lip so hard it bled when Kakashi acquiesced and fell asleep shortly afterwards.

He didn’t know who these people were, nor how Kakashi had become so familiar with them, but they were a threat. A threat to Kakashi if they could overcome his natural and learned wariness. A threat to the village if they could entice a Konoha Anbu to reveal his face and identity and name.

Kinoe hoped that Kakashi hadn’t revealed more to them. Kinoe would watch them and if necessary, protect Kakashi.

By any means. Because – for the first time in a long time – Kinoe wanted to be selfish and he wanted Kakashi to be safe. Safe from strangers and further harassment from the Konoha villagers who still muttered ‘Friend-killer’ when the Hatake passed. Safe from receiving the label ‘traitor’.

* 

Kinoe had watched and waited. He had seen Kakashi rest and awake looking better, healthier, less stressed. He had seen the red-haired woman bring Kakashi’s forehead to hers and seen her whisper and stare intently into Kakashi’s single uncovered eye. He had seen Kakashi shrug and agree to whatever she had said, his shoulders slumping and relief seemingly easing his tension.

He had seen Kakashi bid farewells to many of the group, gripping forearms, exchanging hugs,
dodging mock punches and pressing a masked kiss to the leader’s cheek.

When Kakashi had gone, Kinoe turned his attention to the group, blending even deeper into the trees and masking his presence more. Whilst Kakashi had been present he didn’t want to be too deeply concealed, potentially loosing himself in the trees he was using to hide amongst in case Kakashi had suddenly needed his aid or he had needed to extract Kakashi. With the Konoha shinobi gone however, Kinoe did not need to fear going too deep into the trees.

In fact, going deep into the trees and accessing their network and roots and memories would tell Kinoe more about the group than he might get from just observing them.

Kinoe sank into a tree’s embrace and turned his attention to the group. He wanted to know as much as possible about them. Then, and only then, would he make a decision on whether they were a threat to Kakashi and Konoha. And if they were… Kinoe decided he would make that choice if he needed too.

*  

This group was terrifying. Kinoe had seen them, the trees had shown him them passing through the forests many times before over many years.

Trees have long memories. Longer than any humans. Kinoe asked and the trees shared their memories of Uzu, Yugito and Kisame passing through nearly a decade ago. Then another memory of a larger group Yahiko, Konan and Nagato. Another, Utakata and Kabuto. More and more memories of Uzu’s group growing in numbers and strength.

Kinoe had been shown memories of Uzu’s adopted children training. Of awe-inspiring and fear-inducing jutsu and techniques. Of children learning exactly what their bloodlines and innate abilities could do.

And worst of all Kinoe had seen Bijuu. Bijuu free and untamed walking alongside the human members of the group.

“How many? How many tailed beasts?” He whispered to the trees.

Images of Kōgō the cat, Genbu the tortoise, Mamoru the hound but those weren’t right. Kinoe pushed the image he had first been shown of the Nibi and the Rokubi. The Nibi and the Rokubi’s images were shown to him once more but this time accompanied by the Yonbi and the Gobi.

Four. Four Bijuu.

Kinoe’s blood raced.

Seventeen tails on four Bijuu.

Konoha had a mere nine on the Kyuubi. Kinoe had seen the child. A toddling boy, often caked in dirt and muck and left alone by his caretakers in the dirt patch that passed for a garden in the orphanage, whilst the other children played on the climbing frame and the swings and the slide. Kinoe had been told to watch the boy. To know him by sight, sound and smell. Danzō-sama wanted Kinoe to know who Konoha’s Jinchūriki was because one day, Kinoe’s Mokuton might be necessary to subdue the boy to protect the village.

Kinoe didn’t know if his Mokuton was strong enough. He might be altered with Hashirama’s genes and cells and gifted with his ability, but he was a pale imitation of the First Hokage. Danzō-sama had told him so. Many, many times. When Kinoe failed to achieve things Danzō-sama wanted him
to do. Things that Hashirama had been able to do effortlessly.

But Kinoe would do his duty. He would protect the village. He was one of the Roots in the shadow of the tree. His duty was to the tree, the village. And if he needed to subdue Kyuubi, he would at Danzou-sama’s order. Even if recently a voice in his head had reminded him of how small the Jinchūriki was. How small and delicate and gentle he was. How softly he handled the cheery weeds that were the only thing brave enough to grow in the dirt of the orphanage. How he stroked the bright dandelions and babbled at them. How Naruto Uzumaki smiled at everyone the first time he met them. How Naruto was beloved of Kakashi whom Kinoe had seen secretly sending his ninken to the boy with food, a blanket, a soft dog toy, a soother when Naruto began teething.

Kinoe would do his duty. Only if ordered to. Because Naruto was one of the leaves of Konoha, even if Danzō-sama seemed to think he was a root – only useful as a weapon that could be controlled by another.

This group though. They were not leaves of Konoha. They were a threat. A fire, a disease, a wood-eating insect that could reduce the tree to nothing but ash and dust.

Kinoe swallowed. He knew his duty. To protect Konoha. He would report to Danzō-sama. Inform him of the group possessing four Bijuu and the threat they posed to Konoha. But he wouldn’t mention Kakashi.

*Kinoe lifted his consciousness from the tree he had reached out to and returned to his own body currently morphed into a similar tree. Coming back from the network of energy, memories and thoughts of the trees was always a delicate process that took time. If he did it too quickly the sudden loss of infinite consciousness and being would jar his mind and render him unconscious.

It was a useful technique for information retrieval but delve too deep and he would be lost.

Settling back into his own, individual mind felt like a loss as usual. No longer connected to so much more and so much life.

Kinoe turned his attention back to his surroundings and to his horror Uzu was standing right next to his transformed state. Her fingers perusing his bark. Her eyes narrowed and focused precisely on where his eyes and face would be.

*How does she know? He thought but held tightly to his transformation. She can’t know. I’m a tree. There is nothing different about me to any other. I’m a tree. I’m a tree. I’m a tree. Sage dammit!*

Tsunade was approaching with an axe. A sharp wood-chopping axe. An axe that she was eagerly raising.

Kinoe had a decision to make.

He reversed his transformation, his toes no longer roots but toes, his arms no longer branches but arms.

“Right. I know I’ve been out of Konoha for a while, but I know, for a fact, that I am the last Senju. So, who the hell are you kid?”

Kinoe licked his lips nervously and stared up at Tsunade. He knew she would feel empathy for him if she knew how he had been made. He needed her to feel sorrow for him. To feel responsible. Because Uzu looking at him and her expression was not trusting, not how she looked at Kakashi or
the others. It made him nervous.

“I’m Kinoe. And Orochimaru made me.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter - Kinoe Part Two:
Kinoe kinda broke Tsunade (a little bit). Uzu frightens him off. Danzo gives out some orders. Kinoe makes an independent realisation and decision.
Kinoe - Part Two

Chapter Summary

Kinoe kinda broke Tsunade (a little bit). Uzu frightens him off. Danzo gives out some orders. Kinoe makes an independent realisation and decision.

Chapter Notes

So, this is going to be Kakashi/Tenzou (eventually) but as with most of the relationships in ITAV there won't be explicit scenes. When it eventually happens the most graphic it will get is a bit of kissing. If that isn't your thing then sorry, but it has been tagged Kakashi/Tenzou for a while now in the relationships. I wasn't originally going to pair Kakashi and Tenzou together at all, but I caught some feels and decided to go for it. Tbh, I rarely ship Kakashi with anyone and even then its usually KakaNaru.

Anyway, thanks as always for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kinoe

(Part Two)

*

Tsunade (whom Kinoe was now recalling mentions of by Orochimaru and Danzō-sama) was still staring at Kinoe. To his relief she had dropped the axe but now she was staring uncomfortably intensely at him, taking in every detail of his face, body, bone structure.

“You have my jii-chan’s nose.” She finally said.

Kinoe touched his nose. He didn’t know if he did. Could the Mokuton have changed even that part of him? He knew it had changed him, or rather Hashirama’s genes had changed him, but was his face and body really altered by Hashirama too?

“Umm… thanks?” He said. What was the protocol for meeting the woman who’s long dead grandfathers genes you had been melded with? His training in Root hadn’t prepared him for such an eventuality.

“Orochimaru always did dabble in things he should leave well enough alone.” Tsunade said with a bitter laugh.

Kinoe winced and took a small unconscious step back. She sounded disappointed. He knew she probably didn’t want someone like him, a test experiment, to contain parts of her family. But it stung that she made it sound like Kinoe shouldn’t exist. He might sometimes think that Orochimaru
shouldn’t have been messing around and shouldn’t have altered Kinoe, but if he hadn’t Kinoe
wouldn’t be who he was now. He wouldn’t have met Kakashi.

“Easy kid. Didn’t mean to upset you. Just, a bit shocked that I’ve got a relative with the Mokuton.”
Tsunade pacified him.

“Technically I was made. We aren’t biologically related. Orochimaru crafted me, took me and
added Hashirama to me.” Kinoe offered.

Tsunade winced. “However it happened, you have my genes too, if they are from Hashirama-jii-
chan. Which makes you my relative.”

Kinoe blinked. He still wasn’t sure what to do or say. Every time he opened his mouth Tsunade
seemed to become more uncomfortable or upset. He wasn’t very good at speaking to people. They
were hard to predict and understand. And in Root emotion was beaten and pushed out of you.
Danzō-sama said weapons didn’t need emotions. It was what made Root shinobi so effective.
Those without emotions wouldn’t hesitate. Would obey without question.

Maybe Kinoe really was defective. Because he had been questioning lots of things lately. And he
definitely hesitated when it came to attacking the Hokage and stopping Kakashi when he
intervened.

“Tsunade-oba-chan? Is this your nephew?” Karin trotted over and stared up at Kinoe.

Kinoe blinked down at her and then at the rest of the group who seemed to have taken Tsunade’s
words as permission to approach. There were a lot of them. And then there were the Bijuu too. The
Bijuu not properly sealed inside Yugito, Utakata, Rōshi or Han.

Kinoe flinched away when Yugito got too close and the teen pulled away with a twisted moue of
disappointment.

“We are continuing on.” Uzu announced.

Kinoe saw the group take in her words with a few raised eyebrows and a flurry of hand signals
before they returned back to their route.

“Where are you going?” Kinoe asked.

Uzu looked at him. He didn’t flinch. But he wanted to.

“Konoha.”

“Why?”

“Because I have business there.”

“I see.”

Kinoe saw Yugito and Kisame watching Uzu with matching frowns. The Nibi had manifested,
Kinoe could sense it with his Mokuten. Nibi hiding behind a tree, ready to pounce.

His heart pounded in his chest and he knew that they could hear it.

“There’s something not right about you little sapling.” Uzu grabbed his chin before he even
realised what she was doing.
He wrenched himself out of her grasp and leapt into the trees. He wasted no time hanging around for her to capture him again but fled towards Konoha. Danzō-sama needed to be informed. He needed to know of Uzu and her Jinchūriki who were headed towards the village. He needed to know about the group who bore no hitai-ate but had Tsunade of the Sannin with them.

Kinoe heard someone pursuing him but he didn’t stop. He needed to get away. He didn’t know what Uzu thought was wrong with him, besides the fact that he was failed experiment, a lab rat who’s only purpose was to defend the village.

Nibi appeared before him, having moved faster than he thought it could. It was smaller than he thought it would be but the yowling cry it made was harsher than anything he had heard before. His ears ached but he pushed past the discomfort.

He used his Mokuton and transformed the branches of the tree Nibi was poised on to leap at him from. The branches came to life and wove and sinewed their way around Nibi, capturing and locking down its legs, tails and head.

Nibi yowled again and squirmed but the tree held firm. Kinoe heard a startled yell from behind and glanced to see Yugito barrelling towards him with transformed nails – like cat claws – gouging at the trees she was springing on.

Kinoe dropped to the ground and used a jutsu to vanish into the soil. He burrowed deep, sinking fast as if the soil were water as it parted around him. The thick loam would conceal him and he’d be able to retreat to Konoha undetected.

He needed to speak to Danzō-sama.

*

Returning to Root headquarters coated in thick, rich soil was not welcomed by the other Root operatives. Kinoe could feel their eyes watching him trudge through the dim corridors from the depths of their masks.

He had affixed his own to his face before even entering the village. The mask reminding him of his duty. Of his purpose in life.

His room was as it was when he left it. His bed – a thin mattress on a pallet – neatly made. His normal uniform hung neatly from a bar suspended across the room. His desk with his books and scrolls and inks organised and precisely laid out. The only thing in the room that wasn’t functional was the plant beneath a sun lamp. A rare orchid that he had collected on a mission in a nation full of rainforests. Kinoe had taken a cutting and some seeds. The orchid was the only thing he had managed to encourage to grow in the darkness of the headquarters.

His skill with growing plants was the only hobby Danzō-sama encouraged him to develop. He had no need of anything else. That was what Danzō-sama said.

Kinoe unstrapped his muddy weapons pouch and sandals, depositing them in a pile by the open doorway that led to the bathroom cubicle in the corner of his quarters. His clothing was hastily removed too and added to the pile. He needed to be clean when he went to Danzō-sama. Danzō-sama didn’t need more ammunition to use against Kinoe.

He already knew that Danzō-sama would be infuriated and angered by the knowledge of Uzu and her Jinchūriki. Turning up covered in mud would potentially draw his ire as it would demonstrate that Kinoe had been made, that those he had been observing had discovered him and challenged
him enough that he had fled underground.

Root operatives were the elite beyond Anbu. Kinoe was supposed to be better than that. Danzō-sama couldn’t know that Kinoe had felt fear. Fear at the Nibi and Rokubi and Yonbi and Gobi. Fear at Uzu. Fear at Tsunade knowing he existed. Fear that he would be reviled.

Danzō-sama was not in a pleasant mood most days recently. Kinoe had heard him discussing the Uchiha. Discussing the Uchiha and sending Root operatives to bring Orochimaru back to Konoha, secretly. Danzō-sama was equally frustrated and excited. There was a fervency, a madness of sorts when he spoke.

It terrified Kinoe almost as much as the Bijuu and Uzu did.

It was whilst he rinsed his hair off that Kinoe recalled questions he had forgotten in all the excitement.

How did Uzu know that his transformed state wasn’t a real tree? And what was wrong with him that made her stare at him with an expression that Kinoe didn’t recognise?

It hadn’t been disgust. Not disgust or revulsion or fear or anger. If Kinoe had to name it, it was similar to how Kakashi had looked until recently and when he was sat in front of the memorial stone. Sorrow. But Uzu’s wasn’t just sorrow. It was sorrow and something else.

Kinoe didn’t know what it was. But he kind of wanted to know.

*K*

“Kishi Bojin.” Danzou spat out.

“Danzō-sama?” Kinoe asked but remained knee bent and his head facing the ground.

“There have been rumours of a woman collecting children for years now. I just didn’t realise she was collecting Jinchūriki too. Kishi Bojin. She’s in the Bingo Book.”

Kinoe pulled out his Bingo Book from his thigh pouch. He flicked through the pages until he came across several pages with faces that were hauntingly familiar.

Uzu, Kisame, a trio whom he suspected were Yahiko, Nagato and Konan but their faces were all obscured, Rōshi and Han, and even Yugito and Kimimaro had their own pages too.

Kinoe hadn’t given Danzō-sama their names, only a description of the group he had come across. He didn’t know why but the second Danzō-sama had heard that the leader was a red-haired woman he had grown angered and frustrated. Kinoe was going to supply their names but now… Now Kinoe was more scared of Danzō-sama.

He knew that Kakashi didn’t like Danzō-sama. But Kakashi had liked Uzu. Uzu who was Kishi Bojin and listed as flee on sight. Kinoe didn’t know whether telling Danzō-sama more about the group was a good idea. Not if they had Bijuu and flee on sight orders.

“What would you like me to do Danzō-sama?”

Danzō-sama ground his tea, the noise of the brush on the bowl and against the grains of tea grating in the quiet of the room.

“You said Tsunade recognised your Mokuton.”
"Yes Danzō-sama."

"Then you are to return to the group and pretend you wish to learn more about Tsunade. Claim you feel a kinship to the Slug Princess and would like to get to know her more. You will infiltrate them and get them to trust you. Once they trust you it will be easier to learn their weaknesses."

Kinoe swallowed behind his mask. It felt like he couldn’t breath.

"Yes Danzō-sama. Do you want me to try and persuade them not to come to Konoha?"

"No. Let them come. We know what Kishi Bojin wants. If she has four Jinchūriki she is probably coming for her fifth. I will simply remove our Jinchūriki and hide it away."

Kinoe’s breath stopped. Naruto. Little kind Naruto.

"Will you not need me to subdue the Kyuubi?"

Danzō-sama paused in his tea-making.

"Are you questioning me?"

"Not questioning Danzō-sama. I am aware that my Mokuton is the best method of containing and subduing the Kyuubi. That is my purpose."

Danzō-sama watched for any signs of deception. Kinoe didn’t move a millimetre. He didn’t show any sign of deceit. He didn’t have emotions. Danzō-sama had beaten and trained them out of him. He was a Root shinobi. His only purpose was to protect the village.

"There are other methods for controlling a Jinchūriki.” Danzō-sama finally said.

"You have your new mission. You will infiltrate Kishi Bojin’s group and learn all you can about them. You will remain with them until you have gathered enough useful information or until I summon you.”

"Yes Danzō-sama."

Kinoe nodded and then stood.

"Kinoe… Do not fail me."

Kinoe held back a tremble but inclined his head once, glancing at Danzō-sama from behind his mask.

He had failed once before. He didn’t know how many times he could fail before Danzō-sama found a way of making him more successful.

But he didn’t imagine there would be many chances.

Kinoe strode down the hallways to his quarters. He would leave soon, but first he needed to get a message to Kakashi.

Kinoe was certain of one thing.

Naruto couldn’t fall into Danzō-sama’s control.
Poor Kinoe. He's really not in a good place. But he has been brainwashed and manipulated for as long as he can remember, literally. He has no idea that stalking people is a bad thing.

Next Chapter - Kinoe Part Three:
Kinoe follows through with his decision. He obeys Danzo's command. Mama Uzu sticks her hand in his mouth - for legitimate reasons. Kinoe has an existential crisis (no big deal).
Kinoe - Part Three

Chapter Summary

Kinoe follows through with his decision. He obeys Danzo's command. Mama Uzu sticks her hand in his mouth - for legitimate reasons. Kinoe has an existential crisis (no big deal).

Chapter Notes

Thanks for your bookmark, subscription, kudos and comments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kinoe

(Part Three)

*

Kinoe held a tiny sapling he had forced to grow. In the slender stem he had carved a message to Kakashi.

*Whirlpool needs to be re-potted. Roots are spreading.*

It was vague but Kinoe didn’t doubt Kakashi would fail to grasp the meaning. He also knew that Kakashi would recognise his Mokuton grown sapling. His chakra was imbued in it and it would smell of him.

Kinoe used his Mokuton to sense who was nearby. There were several shinobi but none were Root. Commandeering a messenger hawk was easy, the chunin who managed the birds didn’t even notice him.

The bird’s leg held a strong cord but Kinoe grew a vine around the leg and the sapling to secure it. He needed to ensure this message made it to Kakashi swiftly. Kakashi had left the village early in the morning and encountered Uzu and her group mid-afternoon.

Kinoe had observed them for an hour and conversed with the trees for a similar length of time.

His flight from Uzu’s group had returned him to the village several hours into the night and it was now the early hours of the following morning, nearly a full day since he had followed Kakashi out of the village.

Kakashi would now be on the borders of Fire. Kinoe could only pray that the hawk would find him before he was too far away from Fire.

He lifted his arm and said Kakashi’s name, the hawk chirping before lifting off his arm and gliding down from the Hokage mount where Kinoe had retreated to attach his sapling. The bird wheeled
on the air currents and soared high, out of reach of all shinobi before gliding away from the village.

Kinoe transported himself to the edge of the village and affixed his mask to his face. Uzu and her group would be closer to the village now. It would only take him a few hours to reach them. He knew they weren't moving as swift as trained shinobi. They had an ill woman, a baby and a toddler with them.

He brushed his mind to the trees as he made his way towards the location where he had left Uzu’s group. The trees hadn’t seen them, but they could sense Uzu. He didn’t understand how they could, but they could tell exactly where she was and how far away.

Kinoe inhaled slowly into his nose and exhaled loudly.

He had a mission to complete. And he needed to push his betrayal of Danzō-sama from his mind. Uzu wasn’t an opponent he wanted to face with an uncertain mind.

*  

They were making no attempt to hide their presence. There was a bright fire in the clearing where they had made camp and he could hear them all snoring and snuffling in their sleep.

Kimimaro and the Ame Trio were on watch. Kinoe could see the white-haired man’s hair glowing in the moonlight that was pouring down with its last rays before the sun rose. He looked ethereal and unearthly.

Kinoe watched and suddenly saw Uzu place a hand on the seated man’s shoulder.

“We have a curious visitor.” Kimimaro drawled and spun a knife in his fingers.

“I noticed.” Uzu replied.

“Are we going to invite him in?”

“I’m going to go and speak to him first. Keep watch.”

“Shouldn’t you take Tsunade-oba-chan with you?”

“Not yet. I need to – check.”

Kimimaro raised an eyebrow. Kinoe wondered if he practised making the movement so smooth.

“Check?”

“There is something tainting Kinoe.”

“You know best.” Kimimaro shrugged and the Ame Trio snickered.

“I do.” Uzu teased and ruffled the hair atop Kimimaro’s head, making the man scowl and bat her hands away playfully.

Kinoe licked his lips and hid his Root mask within the tree. He didn’t want Uzu to associate him with Anbu. He wanted her to think he was weaker, less skilled, less of a threat.

Uzu strode away from the camp, her feet bare and silent in the grass. Kinoe watched her trail a hand over the trunks of trees. He could hear the trees whispering.
He licked his lips. Was she really ancient? How old was she if the trees, many of which were over a hundred years old, considered her ancient?

She walked further away from the camp, Kinoe shadowing her from a distance, leaping from tree to tree and noiselessly landing.

“Are you going to come down little sapling? Or are you going to remain in the branches like a bud?”

Uzu called up and looked directly at Kinoe pressed close to the trunk of the tree. Her gaze found him unerringly and without fail. He shuffled forward, crouched on his haunches and wary. Even the strongest tree could be brought down by fire and wind and rain. And to Kinoe, Uzu seemed to be as dangerous as all three. Maybe even more so.

She sank down in the frost-covered grass, her junihitoe spreading around and behind her with practiced eased and elegance. The last of the moon’s light was catching in the shards of frost curled like ferns on the trunks of trees and in the dust-like coat that it had given to the grass. Sat amongst such star-like delights Kinoe could see how Uzu could be mistaken for a goddess, even a child-snatching one such as Kishi Bojin.

Only the plumes of mist curling from her mouth like dragon smoke showed that, heavenly being or not, she did need to breath. To Kinoe’s knowledge anything that needed to breath could be killed. Killing a goddess or goddess like being would not be simple though.

He sprang from his branch and landed several feet away, unwilling to get near to Uzu. She blinked and waited. Only the wind rattling the bare branches of the trees broke the silence between them.

“I can tell I frighten you. That was not my intention.” She finally said.

“I’m not frightened.” Kinoe retorted. Uzu raised a red eyebrow and he swallowed. “Much.”

“You are not going to fool me little sapling. I apologise for my actions yesterday. I did not intend to cause you such fright nor did I plan to grab you.”

Kinoe watched the unpinned strands of hair catch in the breeze and be whipped around momentarily before returning to lay against Uzu’s back. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest. Nobody had apologised to him before. He wasn’t something worth wasting apologies on. He was a tool, a weapon.

“You were looking out for Kakashi, weren’t you Kinoe?”

He blinked.

“You need not fear harm coming to Kakashi from me or mine. Nor do you need to worry about me harming Konohagakure. I may not like the village but I will not intentionally inflict damage upon it.”

“And unintentionally?” The words sprang unbidden from his lips and he bit his lip.

Uzu’s eyebrows raised slightly. She was just as conscious as he that he had not planned to say anything and yet…

“Unintentionally there may come about changes which cause damage to the current status of
Konohagakure’s leadership. It depends on what I learn.”

“Then you are a threat.”

“Is that why you were sent back? To assess whether I am a threat or not? Because I will tell you now, I am a threat. I am and always will be a threat. But you are a potential threat to others too. It is how the world works. The strong are always perceived and are threats to those who are less strong.”

Kinoe tilted his head slightly. He hadn’t thought about it before. He just had to be the best. That was why he was in Root. He was one of the best.

“I wasn’t sent.”

“Yes you were. You were sent by your commander. The one who has put that filth on your tongue.”

Kinoe sprang away but Uzu was there, faster than he could see. Her hand grasping his face firmly but gently. Her fingers pressing into his jaw and forcing his mouth open. Her free hand, alight with golden chakra dove into his mouth and something broke slightly, like a twig snapping but not breaking fully.

Kinoe coughed and spluttered. Black bile and ink dripping from his lips and onto the fabric of Uzu’s robes, splattering the elaborate silks and cloths. Uzu’s hand brought him down to her lap, wrapping soothingly around his neck and massaging the tense muscles and his vomited up the filth that had been a part of him for so long.

His body was wracked with spasms as the tendrils of control that were woven throughout his chakra network, like knotweed strangling the roots and branches of his chakra, were purged and forced back to his tongue, balling up in the seal again like a knot.

“What – what did you do?” He spat.

“I changed the game.” Uzu said. Her fingers massaging the back of his neck. “I haven’t fully removed the seal, that is up to you. But I have removed the compulsion to obey your commander, the restriction on your chakra that prevents you from acting against him. You probably noticed that you cannot go against him easily. That any independent act, like watching Kakashi takes great effort and you are constantly having to fight against a compulsion to return to your master.”

Kinoe shuddered. It was true. Sending that message, the warning to Kakashi had felt like trudging through mud, wading through a swamp with his feet bogged down into viscous slurry trying to drag him down. Not killing Kakashi had felt similarly. Kinoe had not yet deliberately gone against Danzō-sama but even when his thoughts began to turn towards ideas that were opposite of Danzō-sama’s philosophy – his mind would rebel and he would be reminded of Danzō-sama’s teachings.

“You have some of your freedom back Kinoe.”

“I’ve never been free.” He spat. He wasn’t sure he wanted to be free. For the first time that he could ever remember his mind wasn’t focussed on Danzō-sama’s teachings and orders. He could think without being reminded and compelled to obey. His mind was quiet and his own. There was no one inside him telling him what to do. It was utterly terrifying.

“You are now.”

“I didn’t ask for this!”
“I know. And I’m sorry. But I could not continue speaking with you whilst you were a slave without free will and thought and choice. It was abhorrent. To see a child being so confined.”

“I was saved. My master saved me! He brought me out of the tank. I would have died but he saved me so that my life could be his.”

“Your life is your own. Saving a person does not give you the right to command and own and use a person.”

“But that’s what I am! I am a weapon! A tool for the village!” Kinoe looked up at Uzu, tears falling from his eyes. His hand trembled as he touched his damp cheeks. He didn’t know what these were. He had never cried before.

“You are not. You are an individual, with a free will. You are no bonsai to be bent to the form and purpose of human design.”

“I-I-I did not ask for this!”

Uzu used the sleeves of her ruined robes to wipe the tears from his face, petting at his black-stained lips wet with ink and bile.

“No, you didn’t. And I took that choice from you. But it will be the only time I do not offer you a choice. From now, every decision you make will be your own. You may choose to return a loyal soldier to your master. You may choose to ask me to remove the seal fully from you. You may choose to go to Kakashi and seek his advice. You may choose to become a tree. You – may – choose.”

Kinoe stared at Uzu. He did not understand.

What was choice?

*

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact: This chapter wasn’t supposed to become a big philosophical thing… But Mama Uzu decided free will and ending Kinoe’s slavery was more important than what I planned.

Next Chapter - Kinoe Part Four:
Kinoe is struggling a bit with free will and the concept of it. Mama Uzu tries to not to overwhelm him too much. He comes to a realisation about the Bijuu. Mama Uzu offers him food.
Kinoe - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Kinoe is struggling a bit with free will and the concept of it. Mama Uzu tries to not to overwhelm him too much. He comes to a realisation about the Bijuu. Mama Uzu offers him food.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the bookmarks, subscriptions, kudos and comments!

Shout out to MzGreenJeans73 for commenting on every single chapter. Literally. There's 88 of them and I'm pretty sure you've commented on nearly every one. So huge thanks!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kinoe

(Part Four)

* 

What is choice?

What is choice?

What is freedom?

Kinoe didn’t know.

Uzu stroked Kinoe’s damp forehead, wiping away the sweat and fear that had beaded on his skin. Her thumb stroked the curve of his cheek.

“You have lingered too long in the darkness. Trees need sunlight to grow. Leave the soil and come into the light Kinoe.”

“I don’t – I don’t know.”

“I know you don’t. But now, you have the chance to find out whether you want to leave the darkness and find your own freedom. Your own purpose, not as a tool for someone but as your own person. You have your own thoughts and wants and desires? Do you not?”

Kinoe thought of Kakashi. How he had smiled and offered to introduce Kinoe to the Hokage. How he had suggested Kinoe leave Root, leave Danzō-sama. He thought of how he had felt being unknown in foreign nations, just a traveller and for a moment forgetting that he was on missions. He thought of how that moment of just being Kinoe, just being a boy had been liberating and
exhilarating.

“You have time, Kinoe. There is no hurry to decide now. Even if you were to return to your commander this instant, they would not be able to sense that your will has been returned to you. That is why I didn’t fully remove the seal. That and it will take longer to erase it completely from you. The tongue is a delicate instrument and I will need to study the seal carefully before arbitrarily removing it.”

“I could go back? And Danzō-sama…” Kinoe trailed off, his hand grasping his throat and his other hand trailing over his lips. He had uttered Danzō-sama’s name without repercussions. He had said it whilst discussing the seal and he hadn’t been brought to his knees, deprived of oxygen or filled with pain.

Uzu’s face remained impassive but for a slight and momentary widening of her eyes that was over in a second.

“Danzō-sama is your commander?”

Kinoe licked his lips that felt suddenly and inexplicably dry. “Yes. Danzō-sama is my leader. He is the one who rescued me from the laboratory. He brought me out of the dark and death and cold.”

“And what did he do next?”

“He – He took me to another dark and cold place. And trained me to become strong. Strong for the defence of the village. He trained me to do whatever is necessary for the protection of the village. That is all there is!”

“It rather sounds like Danzō liberated you from a dark, cold, lonely place where you had already suffered and seen much death… and then submersed you in another dark, cold, lonely place. Only this time, you were trained to bring about death.”

Kinoe wheeled away, ripping himself from Uzu’s warm hands. She was wrong. She was wrong. Danzō-sama had saved him. He owed everything he was to Danzō-sama. But… what was he? What would he have become without Danzō-sama? Without the training he endured to become Root? What would he have become if Danzō-sama had let him live in the village he was supposed to protect? Would he have joined the Academy? Interacted with children his own age? Would he have wanted to be a shinobi?

“Stop it! Everything you say confuses me more! I’m, I’m, I’m…” He trailed off and leaned against the trunk of a tree. He pressed his face into the frost strewn bark, breathed in the scent of the wood and nature through his nose.

“My apologies. If you have any questions, feel free to ask. I will reply as simply and as plainly as I can. I do not want you to think I am influencing you Kinoe-kun. It is just… When we are in a situation, sometimes it takes a person who is outside the situation and can see – more – to clarify and illuminate the reality.”

Kinoe ignored her last few words but recalled that he had wondered how Uzu had been able to single out his transformed tree.

“How did you know which tree was me? Yesterday. When I was…”

“Stalking Kakashi-kun?” Uzu’s voice was light and sounded like she was smiling. Kinoe didn’t know why.
“Yes. When I was a tree. How did you know I was there? What made me stand out?”

“Professional curiosity? Or is it your curiosity?”

“Both.” Kinoe stated plainly and Uzu laughed brightly.

“Very well. Your Mokuton takes your two chakra natures working together. Water and Earth. Your Mokuton, although it creates, forms, exists as something that is natural, is not natural. Your Mokuton whether you use it to grow a tree or to become a tree is still made of your chakra and it is your chakra that flows through it.”

“You sensed my chakra?” That was less startling than Kinoe had thought. Uzu being a sensor was not an impossibility. Just an inconvenience.

“Not exactly. I sensed that you were different. That your tree was not flowing with nature energy.”

“You’re a sage?!”

“No. I’m made of nature energy. I do not possess chakra like humans do. My chakra as it were is nature chakra. I am literally made of it.”

Kinoe turned. Uzu was illuminated by the dawn light, surrounded by sparkling frost that refracted the light and was almost blinding to look upon.

“You’re not human.”

“No, I am not.”

“And there are Jinchūriki with you. Travelling amongst your group.”

“Yes.”

Realisation hurtled into Kinoe faster than a senbon.

“You altered their seals. Like you did mine. That is how the Bijuu are free and able to move beyond their Jinchūriki’s body.”

“Yes, I did. Because Jinchūriki and Bijuu should not be forced to be prisoners and cages and weapons.”

“But they’re dangerous.” He protested.

Uzu scoffed.

“Many things can be dangerous. A tiny spider could be venomous. A wet puddle on the floor of a bathroom could cause someone to fall and they could hit their head and die. A shinobi can make a spoon dangerous, they can make paper dangerous. Bijuu are dangerous but if you respect their power and them then you are more likely to survive.”

“But…”

“I am afraid this is one area where I will not cede.” Uzu said firmly.

Kinoe stared. He didn’t think he would win an argument with Uzu. Maybe he would never win an argument with her, but he definitely wouldn’t win this one. He could tell, somehow. Maybe it was the tone of her voice, the steely clench of her jaw or the casual way she held her body, as if she was
utterly certain that she was right. And maybe she was. After all, everything Kinoe knew of Jinchūriki and Bijuu was from Danzō-sama and from watching Naruto.

“It is nearly time for my children to wake. Would you like to join us for breakfast? You could speak with Tsunade-chan again? Maybe learn more about Hashirama?”

Kinoe recalled why he was even in Uzu’s vicinity once more. He remembered his orders from Danzō-sama. He wasn’t so sure, however, that he wanted to continue this mission. It didn’t… feel right? But it was his mission. He was to infiltrate Kishi Bojin’s group and gather intelligence.

So, he would do that. And he would decide whether to give Danzō-sama the information he learnt later. When he had learnt some more. Because he already had a vital pieces of intel – Kishi Bojin was Uzu and she was made of nature energy and wasn’t human.

“Yes. I will have breakfast with you.”

*

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is a bit shorter than my usual offerings but Kinoe's arc was only supposed to be four chapters long and this last chapter just couldn't fit into the 2k word limit and cover everything so I split it at the best possible point. But next chapter is the usual length. So you get five chapters to introduce Kinoe instead of four. But then things really start to speed up at the end of the next chapter and shit is hitting the fan! So hang on until the next chapter!

Next Chapter - Kinoe Part Five:
Kinoe doesn't get his breakfast. Mama Uzu's kids are being attacked by an unfamiliar opponent. Kinoe ends up on Uzushio. He isn't particularly upset by this development. Someone brings grave news to Uzushio and a plea for aid.
Kinoe - Part Five

Chapter Summary

Kinoe doesn't get his breakfast. Mama Uzu's kids are being attacked by an unfamiliar opponent. Kinoe ends up on Uzushio. He isn't particularly upset by this development. Someone brings grave news to Uzushio and a plea for aid.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for every bookmark, subscription, kudos and comment!

Warning - there is a rather major time skip in this chapter because I didn't want to spend another two chapters or so explaining how Kinoe's brainwashing was being handled by Mama Uzu and the family and him. I will (eventually) publish the parts I wrote for that, as a separate side chapter once I've coherently linked them together. But they were slowing the pace of the main story down a lot so I lifted them out. Thus we get a brief exposition into Kinoe's thoughts and his mind-conditioning is implied to be changing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kinoe

(Part Five)

* 

Unfortunately, Kinoe and Uzu (and the rest of the group in fact) never had their peaceful breakfast where Kinoe was politely introduced to the many different members of the group. And Uzu had, had such high hopes for a civilised affair, since early in the morning her more unruly children were still sleepy and less prone to causing trouble or being grouchy. Kisame, for instance, was politer when half asleep and having cuddled with Shizune all night.

Whilst Uzu was leading Kinoe back to her camp, him following a few paces behind her, still wary of her (and potentially with good reason) they heard shrill screams and the crack of trees being felled.

More shouts pierced the forest and the crackle of lightning was followed swiftly by a strong blast of wind that ripped bark from the trees and flung it in the air towards Uzu and Kinoe.

Kinoe slammed his hands onto the ground and raised an earth wall before him and Uzu, letting the shards of wood thud harmlessly into the soil and diverting the unnaturally strong wind around them.

As soon as the wind had died down, Uzu leapt to the top of the wall and peered through the trail of forest that had been felled. It was as if a hurricane had uprooted every tree and there was a great
furrow of destruction leading back to the camp.

“Kaa-chan!” One of her children’s scream tore the air and Uzu glanced back at Kinoe.

“I’ll follow.” He said. She wasted no time, not checking to see if he was indeed on her heels.

Kinoe sprinted after her, his blood thundering with anticipation in his ears. Maybe this would be the proof he needed. Maybe one of the freed Bijuu had gone rogue and Danzō-sama would understand the threat Uzu and her group presented.

There was sounds of fighting and then they were both within the now destroyed camp. Kinoe glanced around and saw all the faces he had seen yesterday, now dirtied and scratched and fixed with fearful or enraged expressions.

The oldest of Uzu’s group were defending the youngest and most vulnerable and Kinoe saw Tsunade, Rōshi, Han and Kisame fending off attacks from a cloaked newcomer and four strange creatures.

There were no Bijuu present at this moment. And Kinoe didn’t feel any regret or frustration that his theory had been proved wrong.

Uzu was joined by Yugito, whilst Utakata and Kimimaro formed a guard in front of the young ones and Kimiyo who was kneeling and sheltering Shibuki, Karin and the baby beneath her body. Shizune was hovering beside her with Kabuto and Jugo at her side. Kinoe saw Kimiyo watching the battle with a pale face but her arms were wrapped tightly around the youngest children.

“Uzu-nee! This man! He wants Fū-chan!” Yugito snarled and a blue tail whipped the air behind her.

There was a roar of fire and Kinoe raised another earth wall as one of the strange creatures breathed a red-hot plume towards them.

Uzu bared her teeth, her lips curling back from her teeth in a snarl as vicious as Yugito’s.

“We’re leaving. Grab as much as you can and bring it over to Kimiyo-chan. Make sure we’ve got all the animals too. We’re going and we’re not coming back.”

Yugito nodded and began darting around the ruined camp, snatching up backpacks and bags and flinging them over towards Jugo and Kabuto who darted out from behind Kimimaro and Utakata to grab them and pull their belongings in around Kimiyo. They were swift and sure, piling the belongings around the frail woman as another, meagre barrier between the attacker and his target.

“Why does he want Fu?” Kinoe asked.

Uzu was busy rummaging in her ruined sleeve, muttering under her breath at the sticky fabric that was black and damp with Kinoe’s bile and the ink that he had vomited up. She finally withdrew a parasol and tossed it over to Utakata without even looking.

Kinoe saw the teen catch it out of the air, open it and place it so it rested over Kimiyo and the children she was protecting.

“Fū is a Jinchūriki.”

“She’s only a baby.” Kinoe gasped. “People really attack babies?”
“I suspect he’s done it before. Takigakure burnt to the ground and the only survivors were Fu-chan and Shibuki-kun.”

Uzu whistled sharply and the adults retreated to form a perimeter in front of the teens. The Ame Trio leapt out as the adults retreated and laid down paper seals in a triangle. A barrier sprang up, gold and hissing like boiling water.

Trapped within was the cloaked stranger and the four creatures.

Kinoe ran on Uzu’s heels as she raced to the group. Shizune was healing a wound on Tsunade’s side but the rest seemed unharmed. As soon as the Ame Trio had joined them Uzu began muttering and cut her thumb with her tooth.

For an instant, Kinoe considered leaving. But the moment passed. Whether he stayed with Uzu because that was his mission or because he chose to, he could not say. But he did.

He watched in awe as the golden light, the same light that had ripped the controlling pervasive seal from him swarmed up from the ground in a spiral beneath their feet. It passed through and around them without burning or hurting them.

Uzu turned to stare at the cloaked stranger who was standing as close to the hissing barrier as he could.

“Goodbye!” Yugito jeered and stuck her tongue out.

And then, to Kinoe’s amazement, the forest was gone. There was a tugging feeling on his navel, as if he had been yanked from within his insides and then he was suddenly standing in a courtyard with cream coloured buildings tiled with red.

Uzu looked over her group, accounting for all of them and they announced their presence in an order that seemed disordered.

Kinoe saw new people coming from the buildings and streets surrounding the courtyard, rushing forward and greeting Uzu’s group. There were shinobi, civilians, children and medic nins.

“Welcome,” Uzu said, laying her hand on Kinoe’s shoulder. “To Uzushiogakure.”

*  

Kinoe was trapped. And he didn’t hate it. He’d been in Uzushio for months now, living with Uzu-sama and the motley group he had come to understand were her family in their house (fortress really, because as far as he was aware, only fortresses and temples had nightingale floors and traps).

Winter had come, gone and Spring was settling in its wake. Only thrice had Kinoe sent back a report to Danzō-sama, confirming he was alive and still on his mission with Kishi Bojin. He had not sent back any information about Uzu and the Jinchūriki. He did not think he wanted to.

Kinoe had heard stories before, of people captured by the enemy and then growing sympathetic to them and developing feelings and empathy and friendship. He had wondered if that was what had happened to him. But he did not believe so. Uzu and her children had never tried to influence him. In fact, Uzu daily offered to return him to the mainland. He never took up her offer.

He liked Uzushio. He liked the trees that told him almost impossible to believe stories from ancient times. He liked the villagers, the shinobi and civilians who called Uzushio and Uzushiogakure their
home. How they all pitched in and helped each other. How he was met with smiles and included in
even simple things such as chopping vegetables or carrying shopping for one of the expectant
mothers who’s husband was away on the mainland on a mission. He enjoyed joining in the dances
that would spring up randomly when they'd all had a bit too much to drink. Dancing round and
round on the beaches, the streets and in and out of homes. Frolicking and being utterly free.

He liked spending time with the various members of Uzu’s family. With those around his age such
as Yugito and Jugo who eagerly involved him in their various activities. He enjoyed watching Fu-
chan learning to walk (even though she could already fly with Chōmei’s wings). He liked
accompanying Shibuki, Kabuto and Karin to the village school where they were learning things he
had never learnt like history, art, science, cooking.

He enjoyed sitting with Utakata in the cherry and sakura groves whilst the older teen painted. He
enjoyed watching Kimimaro sewing new layers for Uzu’s junihitoe or making clothing for all his
siblings and aunts and uncles.

Most of all, Kinoe enjoyed getting to know Tsunade. Tsunade who was becoming something like a
mother figure to him. She checked in with him every day, asked what he was doing, offered to
spend time with him, to share stories of her family whom she insisted were his too (both her long
gone Senju and Uzumaki family and her new Uzu family). She made sure he was eating enough,
trained him if she had the time.

Kinoe had finally felt the time right and when he spoke to her one day, he named her okaa-san. The
hug she gave him was the warmest, brightest thing he had ever felt. Like sunlight on leaves.

Kinoe had even grown fond of Uzu-sama. She kept her word and didn’t push or prod, but she was
there if he had a question or wanted her company. He had swiftly grown accustomed to sharing her
time with her children or with the Bijuu who when not with their Jinchūriki would be clustered
around their mother whilst she attended to the duties of the Kage.

Kinoe was content. He was happy. He no longer thought constantly of returning to Danzō-sama
nor of his mission.

He never wanted to leave.

*

But Itachi’s unexpected arrival changed everything. Kinoe’s idyllic, peaceful, deathless existence
was brought crashing back to reality.

Kinoe had not expected to see another loyal Konoha shinobi so willingly and welcomingly allowed
onto the island, let alone within the village. Not from the tales and stories he had heard from the
Uzushiogakure civilians who had shared stories of the Fall during the long winter months and
again at the Remembrance festival when they remembered their fallen dead and those who had
given their lives to allow the children and pregnant women to escape.

There was a sense of betrayal that all Uzushiogakure citizens felt. Betrayal from Konoha. Kinoe
couldn’t help but wonder if Danzō-sama hadn’t had a hand in Uzushiogakure’s destruction. It
would’ve suited him, the Fall. The Uzumaki’s, were headstrong, powerful and not prone to tolerate
warmongering. Kinoe learnt this from his time with Nagato, Karin, Kimiyo and the other
Uzumaki’s who had survived.

It did make him wonder though about Naruto. Poor little orphan Naruto Uzumaki who had family
living not that far away from him, but he had never known. Would he grow to be the same as these
loud, boisterous, kind Uzumaki? Or would he become something darker? Something that Danzō-sama had moulded and grown to his specifications.

Kinoe hoped that Kakashi had managed to ensure Naruto’s safety. He had thought about leaving Uzushiogakure. Returning to Konoha to check on Naruto. He was worried that if he left, he would go back to Danzō-sama.

Yugito brought Itachi into the main room where everyone was congregated for dinner. Uzu rose gracefully from the table to hug Itachi. Kinoe slumped down in his seat next to Utakata and Kabuto but watched as the Uchiha buried his face in Uzu’s hair.

The Uchiha’s hands, fisted in the back of Uzu’s robes and hair were clenched so hard that his knuckles were paler than the rest of his skin. He murmured something into her ear, and she recoiled back to stare him directly in the face.

He nodded and her hands rose to cup his cheeks, tilting his head down so she could press a kiss to his forehead, bare of his hitai-ate.

She stroked his cheek with her thumb and then turned to her family who were all watching anxiously.

“The Uchiha are in danger.”

“Itachi and Shisui?” Yahiko asked.

“No… All of them.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Sorry not sorry for the cliff-hanger/tease/ending...

Fun Fact: I was listening to 'Jenny of Oldstones' from Game of Thrones Season 8 (one of the very few bits of that shit show of a finale season that I actually liked) when I wrote Kinoe's holiday on Uzushio. So yeah, there's a hint to Jenny of Oldstones in Kinoe's thoughts. Wonder if anyone spots it.

Next Chapter - Itachi Part Four:
Itachi is lost and afraid. He asks Mama Uzu (and by proxy her family of course) for help. He returns to the village and takes his mother shopping.
Itachi - Part Four

Chapter Summary

Itachi is lost and afraid. He asks Mama Uzu (and by proxy her family of course) for help. He returns to the village and takes his mother shopping.

Chapter Notes

650+ kudos achieved so y'all know what that means?

Double Update! Because I'm kind and generous and whenever ITAV reaches a hundred or hundred and fifty kudos I give you two chapters as a present. However, I will be updating ITAV every other night for the next week because I'm actually on holiday so will only be posting on Tues, Thurs and Sat because I am not writing every day whilst on my vacation unless I actually feel the muse beckoning. So, double update tonight but then no chapter until Tues 25th August.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Itachi

(Part Four)

*

He didn’t know who to turn to. He could not go to his parents, his Hokage, his cousin, his clan, his Anbu commander, his team captain.

Itachi was so very lost. And afraid.

Afraid in a way he had not been since he was younger and he found his pregnant mother lying on the floor in the kitchen, blood pooling beneath her but not from any inflicted wound. Afraid when she lay in her bed day after day, night after night, pale and weak and full of sorrow and he was terrified she would never get up again and would die where she lay.

Afraid in a way he had not been since the death of his genin teammates and jōnin sensei were killed and lay like broken dolls on the ground and he was alone.

Afraid in a way he had not been since he faced down a Bijuu and learned that she was not the terrifying demon he had been raised to think she was.

Afraid in the same way once more when his mother was in the hospital again and his father was working longer and longer hours and when he was home, he was silent and distant.

Itachi was torn. His Hokage, his village were pushing his clan away, vilifying them. Demonising them. But as far as Itachi could tell there were few facts and events that could have caused such animosity and loathing. And he had investigated. He’d even broken into the records room in the Hokage Tower night after night but found little to indicate where the rumours and tension had started.
He thought about speaking to Kakashi-taichou. But Kakashi was not liked by the Uchiha and whilst a strong and vital shinobi within the village, he was not powerful enough to stand against the Hokage and the council. Itachi also wasn’t sure that his clan deserved to be defended by Kakashi-taichou.

Shisui was just as lost as he. The pair of them working for the Hokage to spy on their people and try and soothe their frustrated clans’ tempers and egos. Shisui was much better accepted by the clan and so Itachi had left much of the clan-handling to him.

Together they had come to the realisation that if they could not find a solution soon something terrible would happen. There was civil war brewing on the horizon. And together they realised that only one person, one family could help them without fearing backlash from Uchiha or Konoha.

“You must ask her.” Shisui whispered as they kept watch whilst Kakashi-taichou slept. “I’ll tell taichou that you went to see Yugito-chan and find out about why we haven’t heard from them for months. You know she’s the only one who can help us now.”

“I know.” Itachi murmured. “I’ll go. But what if she won’t help us?”

Shisui gave him a look. Itachi blinked.

“You really think Uzu-sama won’t help us? You are literally dating her daughter. And she loves us.”

“I’m not dating Yugito-chan.”

Shisui rolled his eyes.

“Not the point. Just go. The sooner you get there, the sooner you can ask.”

Itachi stood, brushing flakes of grass and moss from his trousers.

“I’ll see you soon, Squirrel.”

“You better.”

*

Asking Uzu-sama for aid was easy. Easier than he had thought it would be. Itachi wondered how he could have even entertained, for a moment, that she wouldn’t help him. Falling into her arms and whispering, begging for her help, Itachi had been a man on the edge of insanity. A tight embrace and a kiss to his forehead and his reason and hope was restored.

After he had joined them for dinner, consuming food that, for the first time in what felt like weeks if not months, didn’t taste like ash on his tongue, Itachi joined Uzu-sama, the Ame Trio, Yugito-chan and Kisame in the study. Tsunade-sama barged her way in a short while later with a bottle of sake.

Uzu raised an eyebrow.

“This is one time where we are going to drink. One cup each. Because you know Uzu-sama, that this is going to be a shitshow of epic proportions. We’re already dealing with the freak in the cloak who wants Fu-chan and probably the other Bijuu, and trying to find the one who used Yagura-kun, now we’re adding on Konoha’s problems. We need a fortifying drink before we try to stop whatever trouble they’re in.”
Nobody argued as Tsunade measured out cups for everyone, except Yugito who shrugged and stroked Matatabi who had materialised between her and Itachi and was purring comfortingly sending vibrations through Itachi’s and Yugito’s thighs pressed against her flanks.

Itachi sipped his cup whilst Tsunade and Kisame tossed theirs back.

“Now, Itachi-kun. Can you explain exactly what trouble the Uchiha clan is in?”

Itachi took another fortifying sip. Yugito’s hand left Matatabi’s back and her fingers wound between his. He looked at her, startled. He made to slip his hand from hers but she tightened her grip and refused to look at him. Itachi gave in. It was rather comforting, the feeling of her hand in his. It gave him courage.

“The Uchiha are planning a coup. They want to overthrow the leadership of the village and take command for themselves.”

“I need another bottle.” Tsunade announced and left for the kitchen.

“For once, I am almost in agreement with Tsunade-chan.” Uzu said wearily. “We need more details Itachi but I can promise, I will aid you however I can. We will not stop talking until we have formed a plan.”

“We’re going to help too.” Konan offered. Yahiko and Nagato nodding either side of her. “We’ve been investigating an organisation that seems to be operating from Konoha. During the war we were betrayed by this group, yet we have never been able to find the shinobi who betrayed us. It is possible that the same group have been manipulating the Uchiha.”

Itachi bowed his head. Shisui was right. Uzu-sama and their adopted family wouldn’t leave them to struggle alone.

“Thank you.” Itachi whispered. “Thank you all.”

“Thank us when we’ve got a plan.” Tsunade bossed on her return. This time she wasn’t carrying sake but a tray full with a teapot and cups. Kimimaro, Utakata, Rōshi, Han and Jugo were with her.

They all squeezed their way into the room, folding into the space or leaning up against the exterior walls. Kimimaro slid the window open and nestled himself on the sill.

“Tell us everything you know.” Uzu commanded and Itachi breathed in deeply.

“I don’t know how long, but the Uchiha have slowly been pushed to the edges of the village, physically and metaphorically. We have no power within the leadership of the village, save for my father who is head of the clan and chief of police. After the Kyuubi attack nearly two years ago, our clan was moved to the boundary of the village, even though our compound was not badly damaged during the attack…”

*  

Itachi spoke long into the evening. Everyone listened. They listened and they didn’t judge him or his clan.

He wished they would. Because some of the clan’s actions were not honourable or really justified.

Uzu-sama led the discussion and it continued until the early hours of the morning. Itachi was relieved when the Ame Trio volunteered to leave the island with him and to help him try and find
out who was stirring up the village and to help him find ways of subduing the clan without harming his people.

After only a few hours’ sleep, Itachi bid farewell to Uzu and Yugito-chan. The Ame Trio stood at his back, looking out over the ocean towards the mainland. Another shinobi, one Itachi had never seen before had joined the group. Uzu-sama said that he was simply returning to the mainland for a mission.

“You be careful.” Yugito whispered. She was standing close to him, close enough for her unbound hair to be tickling his nose as it was teased in the morning breeze.

“I will.”

“We will find a way. I promise Itachi.”

His eyes widened as Yugito looked up and he could see the resolve burning in her eyes. His eyes widened further when her lips pressed firmly against his. He closed his eyes and returned her kiss, a gentle, soft movement of lips.

Yugito dropped back down from her tiptoes and tossed her hair back over her shoulder.

“I’m sending Jiji with you. If you need me, send him.”

She winked and then dashed away, leaving the small black cat she had summoned at some point, in his arms.

Itachi shook his head fondly as Jiji clawed his way up around Itachi’s neck and draped himself beneath Itachi’s ponytail.

“Well, are we going or what? And I expect fish from you Crow. The highest quality fish if I’m to be hanging around pretending to be a normal house cat.”

*  

Working together with the Ame Trio, Itachi managed to stave off the need to act until just after Sasuke’s second birthday. But when the time arrived Uzu and the family leapt into action.

Itachi prayed that whatever Uzu-sama had planned would succeed. He hadn’t been informed of her contingency plan in case he and the Ame Trio could not subvert the Uchiha coup or find enough evidence on whom was manipulating events and pushing the Uchiha further and further out of the good graces of shinobi and civilian alike. It would not do for Itachi to be compromised to the Hokage, the village and his clan.

All he knew was that he needed to be at the once a year open market, where traders and merchants and craftspeople from all over Fire and the other nations were permitted into Konoha to sell their wares. Of course, they required a permit to enter and would be thoroughly investigated and checked before being granted entry. Konoha wouldn’t allow just anyone in.

He had received one of Konan’s butterflies the night before the with simple instructions; go to the market and look for an old friend.

Luckily, Itachi had the day off and invited his mother (and Sasuke of course) to go with him. His Hahaue was delighted that he had willingly sought out her company. He knew she was worried. He knew she was aware of the conflict within him. But he only knew this because of his relationship with Uzu-sama. He had seen how she looked and watched her children. If he had not met Uzu-
sama, Itachi doubted he would ever have realised how aware his Hahaue was. How much attention she still bestowed upon him. How much love she watched him with. Love and pride.

Wandering throught the stalls and plots with blankets and cloths laid out on tables and the ground, with his Hahaue’s arm linked in his and Sasuke babbling away on his hip, Itachi was almost able to forget the strife and struggle within him.

“Oh, Itachi!” Hahaue cried. “Look at these delightful hair pieces! And the earrings!”

His Hahaue slipped her arm from his and crouched down in front of the blanket laid neatly on the ground. There were several blankets arranged in three sides of a rectangle and each was strewn artfully with hair pins, sticks, earrings, necklaces, rings and ornaments made of precious stones and origami.

Itachi crouched down next to his Hahaue, catching Sasuke’s grabby hands to stop him from crushing a delicate origami lily speckled with gold dust that stood in a red vase.

“See anything you like obaa-sama?” A familiar voice said.

Itachi looked up and his eyes met a face he was very familiar with. Brown eyes twinkled mischievously at him, freckles were dotted over her nose and cheeks and her hair was pinned back elaborately as usual, but it was a rich, glossy brown and not the corn wheat blonde he was used to.

“Yugito?”

*

Chapter End Notes

Who wants to guess who the shinobi is that left Uzushio with Itachi and the Ame Trio? Mwhaha!

Translation:
Hahaue – a more formal version of mother. Chichiue is the formal version of father.

Next Chapter - Yugito Part Seven will be posted shortly!
Yugito - Part Seven

Chapter Summary

Yugito's on a mission (her first solo mission, although considering Matatabi is always with her can she every actually do a solo mission). She has successfully infiltrated. Mikoto Uchiha is delighted with her eldest son.

Chapter Notes

Double update tonight because we reached 650+ kudos. So make sure you've read Itachi - Part Four before you read this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yugito

(Part Seven)

* 

Konohagakure wasn’t anything special. Yugito had seen many villages (including shinobi villages) in her time with Uzu-nee. She much preferred Uzushiogakure, the village she called home.

The two guards on gate duty had seemed nice. Friendly enough. The other merchants and traders she had been speaking and travelling with said that Konoha was the wealthiest of all the shinobi villages and that you could make a pretty penny if your wares were good enough and priced right.

Yugito was secretly amused that she would hopefully be saving a clan and earning money on her first solo mission.

Setting up her blankets and laying out her wares was a familiar process that required little concentration. Yugito had been selling her hairpins and earrings since she was a little girl, working with Konan-nee to make beautiful, simple, elegant items. They had always sold most of their wares in the villages and towns they stopped in with Uzu-nee.

Between Uzu-nee’s shamisen and Nagato’s singing, Konan and Yugito’s jewellery and Yahiko and Kisame doing odd jobs and labour, they had always had enough money to buy food, a night in an inn or a bath. Sometimes, Yugito missed those simpler years when just the six of them were wandering the nations. But she wouldn’t trade her large, crazy, wonderful family for anything.

As she set out her wares, arranging them carefully so that they would be eye-catching and more likely to draw customers, Yugito kept an ear out listening to the other sellers and merchants as they spoke to the shinobi who were passing through the market on their way to or from missions.

It was strange to think that beneath the positive, wealthy, cheery surface of Konoha, far beyond what most of these shinobi even knew, there was a civil war about to boil up and ruin their idyllic
existence.

She folded her plain, sturdy travelling cloak up and sat down on it, cross-legged. From her satchel, the one where she kept her money and documents, she pulled out a waxed paper bundle and unfurled it in her lap.

*Kenji-san’s mochi.* She purred to Matatabi who was lounging around in her mind.

*Enjoy, kitten. Maybe we can get some fish when we go back to Uzushio?*

*Of course, Matatabi. Grilled fish. And some sushi too.*

Matatabi licked her lips and Yugito smiled. The Hokage came through the market, officially opening it for business and Yugito watched the Sandaime make his way through the neatly laid out rows of stalls and traders.

*He really does seem like a nice man.* Yugito commented as she chewed on her mochi. *If I didn’t know better, I would probably trust him.*

*That nice, old man is known as the Professor. One of the longest lived Kages. Remember, the nice old man routine is a façade.*

Yugito rolled her eyes mentally and snickered as Matatabi swiped a paw at her.

*Stop mother-henning me.*

*Stop being so overconfident. If you get caught Mother will have to mount a rescue and cause a potentially international diplomatic situation.*

*Yes, yes. I know. I’m being careful. Oh Sage, he’s coming over!*

Yugito slipped her awareness fully from Matatabi’s and grinned cheekily at the Hokage as he approached her blankets and peered down at her wares.

“How can I help you Ojii-san?” She said cheekily. Her voice was higher than usual and much less refined than her usual accent.

“How magnificent ornaments you have young ojou-chan.” The Hokage laughed and indicated to her blankets.

“All handmade by meself.” She puffed her chest up proudly and grinned even more.

*Overdoing it a bit?* Matatabi commented. Yugito ignored her.

“Thank you Ojii-san. Can I interest you in anything? Something for the wife? A daughter? A granddaughter? Or maybe a lover?” Internally Yugito cringed at the scandalously rakish character she had chosen to use for her cover.

Luckily the Hokage seemed amused. “No wife, granddaughter or lover. But I do have a daughter. I think she would appreciate a few items. Where did you acquire these stones?”

He gestured to a hair stick lavishly embellished with origami flowers and butterflies set with azurite shards in shades of turquoise and blue. A silk strand hung from the end of the pin with a series of azurite shards that increased in size as the eye travelled down.

“Picked them up on my travels.” Yugito held the pin up the Hokage, offering him a closer look. “I
travel all over, looking for things to enhance my wares. Shells from beaches in different nations, semi-precious stones from the darkest mountains, glass beads from the wealthiest towns.”

“Well crafted indeed.” The Hokage agreed.

They discussed a price and Yugito went slightly lower, saying that she was giving him a discount because he was so charming. The whole time Matatabi was sniping and commenting but the Hokage seemed charmed by Yugito’s persona and there was no indication that he believed her to be anything more than a young entrepreneur.

“Thank ojou-chan.” He said as he slipped the hair pin, wrapped in a tissue paper, into his sleeve. “I hope to see you again next year.”

“Maybe Ojii-san.” She bowed and winked at him. “Depends on if Konoha makes it worth my while.”

The Hokage laughed once more before bidding her farewell and disappearing into the crowds that had gathered to peruse the market whilst he was inspecting and purchasing from her.

That went… surprisingly well. Matatabi commented.

*I did pay attention when Konan-nee and Kimimaro-nii were telling me how to trick someone. Together with Konan-nee’s tricks for getting specific attention and Kimimaro-nii’s tips for diverting attention from things you don’t want someone to see, I think I did pretty good. Yugito sarcastically replied.\n
Considering how beautiful Kimimaro looks, it isn’t surprising that he knows how to use his looks to his advantage and how to turn people’s attention away from him too.

Do you remember that village we passed through when he had finally had his growth spurt and was finally as tall as Uzu-nee? The boys and girls in that village thought he was a moon god.

I recall some of them thought he was a goddess.

Yugito giggled. I would feel inferior next to Kimimaro-nii but he’s just so sweet that I can’t. And his cloth-making skills are too good to be mad at him about his looks.

*\n
As the morning continued on, Yugito sold many more of her wares, so much that she had to lay out her additional stores that she had brought with her from the large wicker basket that Kisame and Yahiko had made just for her to carry her crafts in.

The basket was almost as tall as she, and carried on her back whilst travelling. The back was a solid piece of wood and hinged onto it were the two sides of the basket. Within were shelves, hooks and racks so that she could carefully store her items to prevent damage during travel.

During a lull in trade, Yugito asked the stall next to her if they could pick her up something to eat. The woodcarver had brought his son along to learn the trade and how to sell and they were happy enough to bring her back a bowl of ramen. They had made many more sales than usual due to her presence.

Ladies purchasing earrings and hairpieces from her would be drawn to the woodcarver’s calls as he suggested his boxes for storing Yugito’s jewellery in. It was a lucrative and beneficial partnership.
It was mid-afternoon when Itachi finally appeared. Yugito had a momentary panic when she realised the elegant woman on his arm was his mother and that his little brother, Sasuke, was babbling away and grinning at all the bustle on his hip.

*Oh! Meeting the family! And you aren’t even you!* Matatabi purred, a wicked note in her voice.

Yugito plastered on her cheeky smile as Uchiha-sama crouched down to look at the earrings and hair sticks.

When Itachi finally looked at her face she could almost hear his brain working as he realised who she was. The only sign he gave physically was a slight tilting of his head.

“Oh Itachi-san!” She gushed. Yugito have never, ever, gushed before. But it wasn’t hard to emulate some of the girls who fawned over Kimimaro, Utakata and Jugo back on Uzushio and in the different towns they passed through.

“How wonderful to see you again! Although, I don’t suppose you’ll remember me? We did only meet the one time, in that town in Tea? Koneko-chan at your service.”

Itachi coughed at her name and in her head Matatabi rumbled with laughter.

“Ah, yes. Koneko-chan. I remember…” Itachi trailed off and looked away only to find his mother looking delighted.

“Itachi, introduce me to your friend?” She all but commanded.

“Hahahue, this is Koneko-chan. I had the fortune to meet her during a mission.”

“Uchiha-sama, your son was so kind and helpful. I had just had some of my wares stolen and Itachi-san was kind enough to catch the culprit and return them to me.”

“Oh, Itachi!” His mother smiled proudly at him.

“Anyone would have done the same.” He protested and turned his attention to Sasuke, bouncing the boy as he tottered on the ground between Itachi’s legs, his hands grasped in Itachi’s as he attempted to make a break for the pretty, sparkly jewellery beckoning him.

“No, they wouldn’t. I had been chasing the thief and nobody else stopped to help. But Itachi-san caught the thief with one hand and was polite enough to escort me back to my companions.”

“I am pleased my son knows how to treat a woman.”

“Please, anything you like, I’ll give you a discount. After all, I can’t charge the family of the man who was so kind to me, full price!”

Uchiha-sama beamed at both ‘Koneko-chan’ and Itachi. Matatabi was roaring with laughter at the sight of Itachi so overwhelmed in the presence of his girlfriend and mother.

Yugito continued wittering on blithely to Uchiha-sama, sharing half-truths about her past and discussing her craftsmanship with ease. When the older woman had finally decided on several pairs of earrings and a hair pin, Itachi passed Sasuke over to his mother and turned to Yugito who was bowing as she handed over the package containing their purchases.

Yugito’s eyes widened and she bit her lip shyly, ducking her head to peer coquettishly up at Itachi through her eyelashes. Internally she moaned. There was no way that she would ever be so
obviously flirtatious towards Itachi as herself. It was all rather humiliating.

“Koneko-chan, would you like to come to dinner? If you aren’t leaving Konoha as soon as the market is over?” He invited her and they both noticed his mother’s squeal and smile as she watched from beside him.

“Oh, Itachi-san!” Koneko simpered. “I would be delighted. I have a permit to stay in Konoha for the next two days. I will need time to craft new wares to sell and I was hoping to visit some merchants and see if they have new items I could incorporate into my jewellery. I would be delighted to join you for dinner, that is, if you don’t mind simple travelling clothes? Otherwise I could join you tomorrow, once I have found more appropriate clothes?”

Uchiha-sama bustled in. “You must come in whatever you have. There is need to be so formal Koneko-chan. You are a welcome guest of Itachi-kun’s.”

“Thank you, Uchiha-sama.”

“Mikoto please, Koneko-chan. Itachi will come and collect you from your inn?”

“That would be wonderful Mikoto-sama. This is my first visit to Konoha so I’m afraid I would get lost in such a large village.”

“Wonderful! I must hurry home and start preparing!” Mikoto-sama bowed and hurried away.

Itachi sighed before leaning in to whisper into Yugito’s ear.

“I hope this is all going how you planned.”

“Of course. Do you doubt Uzu-nee?”

“I don’t think I dare.”

*

Chapter End Notes

Translation:
Koneko – meaning kitten (Uzu and Yugito’s idea of a joke)

Remember next update won’t be until 25/08/2020

Next Chapter - Itachi Part Five: Itachi brings his secret girlfriend to dinner. Yugito is worried about offending her boyfriends parents, especially as she isn't even meeting them for the first time as herself. Matatabi is cheering her on, mentally that is. Itachi gets a message...

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!